

Articulating the Nation: National Identity Discourse in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s

By

Rachel Horst

Submitted to

Central European University

History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Balázs Trencsényi

Second Reader: Professor László Kontler

Budapest, Hungary

2009

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Abstract

This thesis examines textual sources from the period of the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary in order to identify and analyze a national identity meta-discourse. Through textual analysis of writings by Hungarian intellectuals, primarily in the social sciences and literary community, it seeks to synthesize the contributions to a societal conversation on Hungarian identity in their contemporary environment. The findings reveal a complex but nevertheless inter-related societal exchange based on the reemergence of a Hungarian society autonomous from the socialist party-state as well as from the degenerating effects of its totalitarian past. This regeneration takes shape from the ground up in the writings from this period, both as a reflection of and as a catalyst of the political, social, economic and cultural developments of the period.

Based on the sources analyzed here, structured temporally and thematically, the discourse on national identity in Hungary assumes a coherent shape. The analysis of the details of the discourse is based on the retrospective views towards the previous century searching for continuities, precedents, and transformations in the time between them; the contemporary discourse on "society" concerning the Hungary's place as a member of the Central European region as well in its own historical experience, drawing on themes from the discourse on the nineteenth century; and the meeting of the past and present of national identity in the single issue of Hungarian national minorities abroad. It reveals that the efforts of intellectuals to fulfill the role of national identity articulators did so actively and through the medium of society and its development, even in an era of still limited freedoms.

Introduction	2
Theoretical Approaches	12
Setting the Stage: Writing Under Kádárism	20
Chapter I. The Search for Original Truths and Fictions: The 19th Century as Historical and Literary Subject	27
Historiographic Considerations	28
A Short Word on Marxist Historiography vis-à-vis the 19th Century	29
1848 : Lessons and Perceptions of Reform and Revolution	30
Embourgeoisement, Part I: A Process Incomplete	31
The Nationalities "Problem"	35
The Multiplicity of Compromise	40
Embourgeoisement, Part II: Budapest and Vienna	46
A Sojourn Into the Literary: The Petőfi "Cult" as an "Embedded" Poetic Function	49
Conclusion	59
Chapter II. Contemporary Hungarian Society and Identity in Fictional and Non-Fictional Writing	60
Points of Departure in the History-Nation Relationship	61
Spatial and Historical Placement of Hungary in Europe and the Longue-Durée	65
From "Alternatives" to "Euronationalism"	69
Confronting the Socialist Past and Present: Reality and Utopia of Hungarian Marxists in the 20th Century	76
Literature: The Personalization of Society	80
Memory/Memory of Death/Death of Memory	81
Touches of Romanticism and the Game of Language	86
The Tragic Irony of the Plan	90
Sexuality as Societal Metaphor	93
Conclusion	97
Chapter III. National Minorities	98

The Exportation of Hungarian National Identity	99
Domestic Disempowerment	99
International Attention.....	102
The “New Nationalism” and Narratives of the National Minorities Problem.....	104
The Internationalized Appeal- The Case of Miklós Duray.....	110
Conclusion.....	112
Conclusions	113
Bibliography	122

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude for the academic and creative guidance of Professor Balázs Trencsényi throughout this entire process. I am thankful for his consistent help in exploring the Hungarian identity through the written word in as many ways a non-Hungarian speaker can.

I also thank Professor László Kontler for his encouragement throughout the evolution of this project.

This thesis could not have materialized any earlier in my intellectual development, so thank you, Mom and Dad, for setting it in motion.

Introduction

Casting an academic glance into the intellectual atmosphere of 1970s and 1980s Hungary reveals a contradictory image of imposed restriction and an increasing internal pluralism. There were many questions of a societal, political, cultural and economic relevance left unanswered in this socialist system, unable to exploit the creative potential of a fully liberated intellectual community- or, for that matter, fully liberated society. Nevertheless, there was one issue, that of national identity, that invoked a tangible and independent discourse in Hungarian society in this “liberalized” period. What distinguishes the 1970s and 1980s from its predecessors is its intermediate placement on the cusp of the ossification of a largely illegitimate post-revolutionary regime on the one side, and the unforeseeable transition out of crisis on the other. Thus insights of this period are so valuable in observing the discourse of an emerging post-Stalinist society engaged in reflection on its own emergent character; the discourse on Hungarian national identity in this period was both a product and determinant of this self-awareness.

Those elements of society associated with articulations of national identity, many banished to the margins of a totalitarian system in the pre-1956 period, were now in a position to at least partially circumvent the inherently conflicted Kádár regime and task themselves with imagining the rehabilitation, actualization, and future formulation of a suppressed Hungarian national identity. These members of the intellectual community, both reaching back into their traditional roles and reinventing themselves as harbingers of a new national identity, set about their discourse focusing on the only recently reemerging Hungarian society- that is, one separate and distinguishable from the socialist party-state. Indeed it was through the wholesale reworking of the idea of Hungarian society that its national identity was able to assert itself. This story will be told primarily through the

writings of social scientists and writers. One may view these differing pieces in a larger milieu of intellectuals asserting their positions in the national identity they wish to forge.

The situation, however, was further complicated by the changing roles of intellectuals in this period. Both literature and historiography had by the 1970s reacquired some diversity within their own disciplines, moving ever further away from debilitating experiences of the 1950s.¹ Yet the 1960s emphasis on a more “scientific” approach to society and the nation had in the meantime altered the status of these disciplines in society, turning the national discourse over to more “scientific” disciplines such as sociology. Likewise such “sciencization” affected the perceived role of writers as the primary source of national identity articulated through the written word.² No longer in possession of “epistemological superiority”³ or the role of “nation’s prophet”⁴ of previous centuries, these internal identity crises no doubt added to the already anxiety-filled atmosphere of the early 1970s.

At the same time, these traditional roles evolved in response to a “more professionalized”⁵ approach to national identity, and despite, or perhaps as a result, of this change in their *raison d’être* carved a new niche for themselves in both disciplines. Moreover, the primacy of sociology indicated the increased investment in Hungarian society, which it was arguably better equipped than historians to serve due to the liberties it was afforded from the official confidence in the authority of empirical research.⁶ It was likewise a strategy of

¹ Péter Apor and Balázs Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past: Hungarian Historical Writing in the 1990s,” in *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, eds. Sorin Anton, Péter Apor, Balázs Trencsényi (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 6.

² Iván T. Berend, “Contemporary Hungary, 1956-84” in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Péter F. Sugar (London: Tauris, 1990), 394-97.

³ Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, “Introduction: National History Writing in Europe in a Global Age,” in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

⁴ Berend, “Contemporary Hungary,” 396.

⁵ György Csepeli, *Structures and Contents of Hungarian National Identity: Results of Political Socialization and Cultivation*, trans. Chris Tennant (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 107.

⁶ Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 15

historians to adopt certain empirical methods from sociology, for instance, in social history, that enabled them to research similar topics without being overtly political in their historiography.⁷

In line with this theme of evolving societal roles, the preoccupation of Hungary's traumatic recent past was an issue not entirely manageable by the use of empirical tools. Here the role of writers fulfilled a salient social need as "keeper of records, custodian of the memory, and truth-teller of the nation,"⁸ as author Richard Esbenshade terms them. This was a direct societal result of Hungary's totalitarian experience,⁹ which rendered other institutions of public discourse entirely indistinguishable from that of a state whose machinations were so damaging for their "manipulation" of "collective memory."¹⁰ This problematic theme of memory, subjective in its very nature, greatly influenced the creative work of Hungarian intellectuals, particularly its writers. The task of recollection was thus highly politicized and treacherous territory in which Hungarian writers carried out this work and attempted to somehow represent the nation in its coming to terms with the past. This was not, however, the only preoccupation in literature during this period, nor was it an exclusively literary phenomenon. Confrontation of the past took many intellectual forms.

The importance of memory, and to a greater extent, resolution of this totalitarian past sheds light on the detriment caused to Hungarian society under the repressive socialist system. The Hungarian sociologist Elemér Hankiss presents such a grim image of a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Richard S. Esbenshade, "Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe," *Representations* 49 (1995): 74.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 76

“paralyzed society”¹¹ in Hungary under totalitarian rule in the 1950s that the survival of social cohesion is barely traceable. Hankiss enumerates the short- and long-term effects that correspond to this experience; the atomization of society, isolation of the masses, breakdown of social networks, abandonment of civil rights, and the “destruction of the human factor.”¹² Thus intellectual engagement in the national identity of the 1970s and 1980s, as a successor society to that of the 1950s, was as much about rebuilding and rehabilitating as it was about the fulfillment of the voids left by that which could not be retrieved. Hence also the reason why the societal discourse was so urgent in a period of relative prosperity and quiet; it was this very partial liberalization that was bringing to light the extent of the damage this societal paralysis had enacted on what was left. An additional quote from Hankiss encapsulates this apprehensive tone:

up to now [Hungarian society] has figured in the narrative only as second fiddle, in its defensive role, trying to protect itself against the ruling elite’s despotic and, later, paternalistic strategies of oppression. However it did also play an active role throughout these decades for more space and more freedom. It made huge and heroic efforts to create for itself a sphere of autonomous action and life.¹³

This was not, however, simply a question of making sense of past events; a reasoned reflection on contemporary society after de-Stalinization and the traumatic disjuncture of the 1956 Revolution was also in order. This question was a complicated one, as it incorporated ideology- namely, Marxism, now confronted with resurfacing “bourgeois” ideas¹⁴- as well as other cultural, economic and political issues in the assessment of the status of present-day society. The value judgments passed on the Kádár regime were also posed in this paradigm, where the short-term benefits of a latent dictatorship were contrasted with the deeper, longer-term ills seemingly unsolvable from within the socialist system. In fact the very term

¹¹ Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 81

¹⁴ The idea of *embourgeoisement* will be addressed in Chapter 1.

“dictatorship,” much like totalitarianism, took on a new significance in this period, applied to describe the character of Kádár socialism.¹⁵ Among such criticisms is the overarching conviction that “compromise” is by no stretch of its linguistic capacity a descriptive term for 1970s or 1980s Hungary.¹⁶ Most importantly, the intellectual resentment aimed at the continuity of a system that allowed only protracted freedom was based not solely on one aspect of its offenses, but for the totality of its maltreatment of society- from the lack of democratic values to the continuation of a planned economy to the cultural subordination of continued Marxist rhetoric. It is in this way that such critical perspectives of contemporary society participated in the same discourse.

Of course, the work of intellectuals was not always resolutely created in opposition to the system for the assertion of national identity. To be sure, the works that are subject to analysis here are not unified in their negative perspectives or unwavering fixations on totalitarianism or maldevelopment. In fact, a number of writings by nature of their *longue-durée* focus are searching for broader themes and therefore subordinate even such recent events to a greater narrative, and still more possess an entirely different mandate, such as an assessment of the effects of international politics on Hungarian identity. That said, it is difficult to separate in essence these tendencies from the underlying ones in a society still inhibited by the influence of the state from realizing its own autonomy. In a way, the very pluralism to which even strictly historical works contributed their research was the force chipping away at the seemingly immutable socialist system and an assertion of identity necessarily set in opposition to it.

¹⁵ This refers to the “dictatorship over needs,” a phrase coined by Marxist philosophers, and will be addressed in Chapter 2.

¹⁶ This term is used in a variety of sources to describe the period. For instance, see: István György Tóth, ed., *A Concise History of Hungary: The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Bernard Adams, et al. (Budapest: Corvina, 2005), 603.

What becomes clear here is the primacy of pluralism, of the links and divides that reinforce, inform, deconstruct, all existing in a meta-discourse on a *Hungarian* society, that is, a national society, influenced by the insecurity of its own continuity. This is the primary aim of this thesis: to show in an albeit abbreviated, but in the spirit of its efforts, also representative, way an image of this discourse on national identity, built from the sources operating in its extensive intellectual sphere. While a comprehensive, autonomous narrative grounded in the vast spectrum of crosscutting textual contributions to the various discourses of the 1970s and 1980s is neither achievable nor expected here, this small insight into the greater question of Hungarian national identity will hopefully aid in the understanding of its greater meaning as an indicator of and force of cohesion for a living and active Hungarian society in its time.

To this end, the thesis will embark on this analysis using the following framework: beginning with a short contextualization of intellectual life, with an emphasis on historiography and literature in Kádárist Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s, three substantive chapters will follow. The first addresses historiography on the 19th century, exploring a variety of themes extracted from the literature and analyzed in light of their application to contemporary social questions as well as the direct parallels to political, economic, and social characteristics of 1970s and 1980s Hungary. This chapter takes into account the varying historiographic approaches to the canonization of 19th century history in an attempt to tie together the complimentary and divergent arguments put forth by these historians of varying backgrounds. It also analyzes the treatment of national identity in artistic representation, searching for 19th century themes among poets, playwrights, and authors.

A second chapter incorporates a wide variety of sociological, historical, anthropological, and multidisciplinary writings addressing Hungarian national identity

through questions of regional European identity, long-term historical development, the totalitarian past and transition, and assessments of contemporary problems connected to these themes. This is placed alongside an analysis of literature consisting of short stories and novels by a variety of authors treating national identity as their subject through the use of various literary strategies.

Finally, the third chapter introduces the single issue of Hungarian national minorities and the meeting of many themes discussed in previous chapters culminating in the most influential issue affecting Hungarian national identity in the 1970s and 1980s. This will be concluded with a discussion of the discourse created by these themes in the context of a society in (partial) transformation.

This attempt leads to a further assertion on the resultant national identity discourse rooted in the strengthening of its societal fabric. One may look to the 1970s and 1980s Hungarian experience not for its obvious shortcomings, but for the greater achievement of its intellectual endeavors. The pluralistic composition of its discourse speaks to a society building an immunity to the repression of its own system. Ultimately this investment in its own societal fabric serves as evidence of the survivability and transformability of a national identity embedded in it. Such pluralism as is displayed here, even in the absence of a truly liberated society, ultimately defines the unifying framework of a community bound in its common experience, that known as the nation. Even when confronted with a systemic attack on its very being, so long as it retains this pluralistic character in the minds of its articulators, the long-feared annihilation of the nation is rendered obsolete.

The major obstacle to this thesis, namely, that it is composed entirely of texts written or translated into English or German, requires little explanation. What must be addressed is,

conversely, the reasoning behind writing on a decidedly Hungarian subject without knowledge of the Hungarian language. This is in large part related to the available literature on the subject of national identity as related to historiography and literature in Hungary, or, for that matter, Central and Eastern Europe in general. While one may extract the feeling after reading an initial survey of Hungarian poetry or literature that there is perhaps an exceptional place afforded writers and poets in national identity formation, it is difficult to find confirmation in English language literature. To be sure, there are ample sources which engage the issue of national identity in Central Europe, or even Hungarian national identity in the 19th and 20th centuries, but they are not met by an adequate number of sources on Hungarian literary and historiographic trends, and there is certainly little literature addressing the interaction of all three.

It is for this reason that I have set about the task of piecing together this thesis with the available literature, in the hopes of constructing a narrative somewhat reflective of the relationship between these three concepts. This is no doubt a challenge, as those very works upon which the knowledge expressed here is based are also heavily influenced by the contexts they are written in; many also serve a dual purpose here as primary texts for close reading, making the task of evaluating and relating these sources to one another a difficult one. But it is possible that by approaching these texts from the “outside,” that is, without a previous thorough steeping in the myriad discourses and cultural sentiment in which these texts were constructed, despite the initial cultural ignorance of the reader, can in the final analysis lend a new perspective to the overall picture gleaned from the works as they are collected.

Furthermore, the stated aim of the thesis is to locate a plurality in Hungarian writing involving national identity in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to their temporal vicinity to the

present day, these events are only now being incorporated into a historical framework. Dealing with a subject just barely outside the margins of contemporary society is also an attractive notion, and this distant perspective will hopefully contribute to the historical treatment of this crucial period in Hungarian history. On a related note, while there is much work currently to be found on the transition from socialism to democracy or the “memory” of socialism in post-socialist societies, the merit of historical inquiry into a period where the transition is barely a vague notion in the minds of those living under socialism is that it holds relevance for both periods. The 1970s and 1980s are that much more interesting from a historical standpoint because of the relatively liberalized atmosphere just on the edge of drastic change.

The premise that history, literature and national identity indeed do function traditionally as mutually informing concepts in Hungary is a notion that is found in a variety of sources. Such explanations as those found in the work of Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer¹⁷, who explore the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe in their analysis of literary culture, were highly influential in forming a basis for this thesis. Likewise the research of George Mosse and Werner Laqueur,¹⁸ though writing in a somewhat earlier time period, provide a helpful English language perspective on literature and the role of the writer in Hungary. It is necessary to mention also Lóránt Czigány,¹⁹ whose comprehensive work on Hungarian literature in the 20th century illuminates the works and biographical contexts of otherwise inaccessible Hungarian authors, as well as major literary trends. Finally, George

¹⁷ Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004) .

¹⁸ George L. Mosse and Werner Laqueur, eds., *Literature and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

¹⁹ Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

Szirtes,²⁰ extensive translation and editing work as well as Kenneth McRobbie's²¹ analyses of Hungarian poetry and short stories have also provided guidance and insight into the literary tendencies of modern Hungarian authors and poets.

For a historical background of the period, this thesis relies on a number of sources on the history of Hungary, including volumes by László Kontler,²² István György Tóth,²³ and Péter Sugar.²⁴ Initial considerations of political trends in Hungary in the 20th century find their basis in the writings of István Bibó. As for a thorough review of historiography in Hungary in the 20th century, the thesis is heavily indebted to the guidance provided by the work of Balázs Trencsényi and Peter Apor.²⁵

Additional insights into the cultural and anthropological trends of 19th and 20th century history can be found in the discussion of historical “cults” by Árpád von Klimó²⁶ and Alice Freifeld.²⁷ These authors illuminate the secularized cult function developed in the 19th century and used into the 20th centered on events, figures, and places. Further research on 19th century trends and the legacy of liberalism in Hungary can be found also in the many works of András Gerő²⁸ and Iván Zoltán Denes.²⁹ Finally, for a discussion of identities and

²⁰ George Szirtes and Miklós Vajda, eds., *An Island of Sound* (London: Harvill, 2004)

²¹ Kenneth McRobbie, “Towards Renewal of a Democratic Poetics: Four Younger Hungarian Poets,” *Cross Currents* 5 (1986).

²² László Kontler, *A History of Hungary: Millennium in Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

²³ István György Tóth, ed., *A Concise History of Hungary: The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Bernard Adams, et al. (Budapest: Corvina, 2005).

²⁴ Péter F. Sugar, ed., *A History of Hungary*, (London: Tauris, 1990).

²⁵ Péter Apor and Balázs Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past: Hungarian Historical Writing in the 1990s,” in *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, eds. Sorin Antoni, Péter Apor, Balázs Trencsényi (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007).

²⁶ Árpád von Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte : zur Nationalen Geschichtskultur Ungarns im Europäischen Kontext (1860-1948)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2003).

²⁷ Alice Freifeld, “The Cult of March 15,” in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, eds. Maria Bacur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001).

²⁸ András Gerő, *Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience*, (Budapest: CEU Press, 1993).

²⁹ Iván Zoltán Denes, ed., *Liberty and the Search for Identity : Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires* (Budapest: CEU, 2006).

conceptualizations of national identity in writing, this thesis turns to the work of György Csepeli³⁰ and as well as György Schöpflin and Nancy Wood.³¹

Theoretical Approaches

Several theoretical considerations emerge in this investigation of a discourse on national identity in written expression. First and foremost is the need for a definition of the object of this study, the very *national identity* that the thesis intends to illustrate from these written sources. Much research and theoretical musing has been dedicated to nationalism research in the 20th century and continues to reinvent itself even in the present day. It is appropriate here to survey the discourse and come to some conclusions on terminology before proceeding any further.

The examination of national identity in the thesis derives its definition from the concept, as the name implies, of one such form of identity that may exist among several others. David Miller discusses this crucial aspect of identity in his *On Nationality*, where he claims that national identity largely involves a *choice*³² insofar as individuals can determine what role, that is, to what extent national identity is afforded importance in the construction of one's understanding of self. The *national* element of national identity inevitably contains an implication of belonging to a group,³³ as Miller also acknowledges, and it is the binding forces of this group that are not dependent on the individual but rather based on the understanding of a collective with some connection between its members. The sociologist

³⁰ György Csepeli, *Structures and Contents of Hungarian National Identity: Results of Political Socialization and Cultivation*, trans. Chris Tennant (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989).

³¹ György Schöpflin and Nancy Wood, ed., *In Search of Central Europe* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989).

³² David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) , 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

György Csepeli expands on this definition in his analysis of Hungarian national identity, where he defines national identity as a “system of communication” that connects the individual to society³⁴ and provides a feeling of belonging to a greater group. National identification, according to Csepeli, is equated with other forms of social identity: “Its only function is to enable the individual to place himself along the dimensions of familiarity and unfamiliarity among large groups of people beyond the realm of direct personal experience.”³⁵ Viewing national identity as a system of communication and as a source of group belongingness establishes a crucial connection to and dependency on society. Placing it into the socio-political realm also enables national identity to serve as a measurement of changes in society as well as relations between politics and society.

At the same time, both definitions acknowledge the ability of national identity to act not simply as a product of socialization, that is, from the collective to the individual, but also in the opposite direction. As Csepeli states, human beings have an innate tendency to move from uncertainty to certainty, securing one’s place on the national level as a means of stability.³⁶ This function of national identity also opens up analysis to the level of individual communication, such as literature, as well as other forms of self-expression observing society through the lens of a single actor. These will serve as indicators of society as well while playing its part in the greater phenomenon of national identity.

For the purposes of this investigation, it is useful to focus on this mutual relationship between society and the individual mediated by identification with a collective, i.e., the nation, and to place it in contrast to the philosophy of Hannah Arendt on totalitarianism. For Arendt, “totalitarian tyranny is unprecedented in that...it melts people together in the desert

³⁴ György Csepeli, *Structures and Contents of Hungarian National Identity: Results of Political Socialization and Cultivation*, trans. Chris Tennant (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang: 1989), 12.

³⁵ Ibid 37.

³⁶ Ibid 36.

of atomization,”³⁷ that is, it eliminates individualism and makes the “government safe from the disturbing interference of human wishes and needs.”³⁸ Elemér Hankiss delineates similar societal effects of the totalitarian experience in Hungary with the term “paralyzed society.”³⁹ Arendt’s emphasis on the sameness of the party-state and the society under totalitarianism stands in complete conflict with any forms of identification relating the individual to a collective. This is because, as Arendt states, the collective has been reduced to “One.”⁴⁰ Hence not only is society atomized, it is literally eradicated through totalitarianism. While the extent of totalitarianism did not reach its ideal form in Hungary,⁴¹ this dichotomy will provide a theoretical anchoring for the study of Hungarian societal (re)development as an exercise in national identity, and, in turn, an intellectual discourse linking the two. One further point is the implication of plurality as the diametric opposite of the totalitarian imposition of singularity of human beings, used here to convey the general meaning of diversity, but also as an indicator of the at least partial separation of society from the state.⁴²

The specifically political character implied by *nation* as an identity, however, distinguishes it from other forms of community affiliation. Miller builds on this concept by emphasizing the application of the political notion of *sovereignty* rooted in the philosophical developments of the eighteenth century in the community that renders its members the “ultimate source of political authority” possessing “reciprocal legal rights.”⁴³ The understanding here of national identity that coincides with a legal state framework is based

³⁷Hannah Arendt, “On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding,” *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress* (1998) http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mharendt_pub/05/051930/0038.jpg (accessed June 6, 2009), 33.

³⁸ Arendt, “Totalitarianism,” 36.

³⁹ Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 7.

⁴⁰ Arendt, “Totalitarianism,” 35.

⁴¹ See: Ferenc Fehér and Ágnes Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left : Totalitarianism, Freedom and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) .

⁴² This is to clarify that “plurality” in this thesis is not intended to strictly convey Arendt’s use of the term. See: David Luban, “Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt’s Theory of Theory,” in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, ed. Lewis P. Hinchman (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1994), 235.

⁴³ Miller, *On Nationality*, 29-31.

not just on the emotional aspects of human nature and identity formation. Smith specifies that in the Central European case, where the phenomenon of national identity, more reliant on factors such as literature and culture, constituted an *ethnic* dimension in contrast to the strictly territorial-political conception of national belonging.⁴⁴ Csepeli terms this “ethnocentric” *thinking* and *ontology*, which allows for the creation of an “in-group,” a collective based on such ethnic criteria, to be prioritized over others.⁴⁵ This specifically ethnic character of Hungarian national identity will also resurface throughout the thesis. One may argue with such theoretical backing that the prioritization of ethno-cultural criteria over political-legal aspects magnifies the importance of an intellectual discourse for Hungary in particular, as it is through this medium of linguistic and cultural expression that other spheres, such as the political or economic, are filtered.

This definition also incorporates a final point of national identity in that it not only ties together member of a community with political implications of present and future, but that it is also rooted in the sense of a common past. Miller addresses in his definition, where members of the same nation “share a common mass culture and common historical myths and memories.”⁴⁶ Hence national identity is highly dependent on the binding force of a shared history, and in many cases this consideration incorporates itself into the modern historical narrative. Here it is prudent to address the issue of memory that has already been referenced in this introduction. It is not intended here to engage in the discourse on memory, memory politics, or history versus memory. However, Wulf Kansteiner’s assertion that “collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material,” that it is “mediated,” and that collective memory should not be reduced to the level of the individual

⁴⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 12.

⁴⁵ Csepeli, *Hungarian National Identity*, 13.

⁴⁶ Miller, *On Nationality* 14.

speaking for society⁴⁷ seems logical in the Hungarian case. However, individuals, such as intellectuals, may formulate this collective memory as that *mediator*.⁴⁸ Thus avoiding the divisions or hierarchy between memory and history, it suffices to say here that in the references to memory in this thesis there at least some historical validity attached to retrieving the collective memory, primarily through the conduit of the intellectual whose “choice” it is to formulate it.

Furthermore, if national identity is understood as a “historical” identity, that is, the identity of a collective possessing an individual character or “personality,” as authors Berger and Lorenz state, which is “conceptually linked to notions of origins and continuity,”⁴⁹ then the significance the shared historical experience contributes also to the shaping of the national’s so-called individualism. Therefore the shared or collective identity is further distinguished from, as in this instance, a totalitarian regime through its own shared past.

With these clarifications, it is possible to set forth on an analysis of the mediums of literature and historiography, whose functions are both relevant to expressing and supporting national identity. Another question that may be posed at this juncture then, is who the articulators of identity are, and how the identity is expressed, not only in terms of the medium utilized but the specific societal role occupied by the individuals charged or privileged with the task. As Csepeli states, those societal figures with the sufficient amount of “cultural hegemony”⁵⁰ shift as conditions in society change, and are determined by the provisions and shortcomings of the political and social atmosphere. As will be analyzed later, György

⁴⁷ Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 185.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Berger and Lorenz, *Contested Nation*, 28.

⁵⁰ Csepeli, *Hungarian National Identity*, 13.

Konrád and Iván Szelényi claim that it is the intellectuals that possess knowledge “capital.”⁵¹ While their claim that the intellectuals are forming a class is not particularly relevant here, it is useful to refer to the relatively secure and powerful position of intellectuals in the region under socialism. It is mostly these individuals, though defined by Konrád and Szelényi as “marginal intellectual[s],”⁵² that form the bulk of the articulators here.

The move from mere contextualization of the works to identification of a view of national identity calls for a close reading of these sources which are centered on various societal themes. There is significant theoretical discourse surrounding the value of reading “between the lines” and utilizing text- historiographic, literary, or otherwise- to gain insights into a greater context such as Hungarian national identity. While close reading is often associated with methods employed in literary criticism, there is a sizeable body of literature supporting its relevance towards historical ends as well. This discourse on historical *interpretation*, as it were, has in recent decades become integrated into a broader one on literature, culture, society, and even the nation. The discussion of method here, of the connections and even sameness between literature and the historical narrative, intersects with arguments of theory in the work of Hayden White and New Historicists.

The theoretical starting point for parallel interpretation of historical and literary works is found in the writings of the New Historicists, considered a literary movement by definition, though hardly easily associated with a concrete theory.⁵³ Its approach is based on the conceptualization of literature as inseparable from the historical context of its writing. New Historicism demands that all texts be taken into consideration as representations of the

⁵¹ György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1979) 12 .

⁵² Ibid., 234.

⁵³ Laurenz Volkmann, “Reconstructing a Useable Past: The New Historicism and History,” in *Why Literature Matters*, ed. Rüdiger Ahrens (Heidelberg: Winter, 1996), 325.

circumstances and perspectives in which they were written, thus granting a historical significance to literature.⁵⁴ Their argument for the mutual interaction between literature and history in large part guides conceptually the joint efforts of the sources employed in this thesis. Here it takes from their approach to literature by granting this historical significance to all the sources, regardless of the genre, but with obvious care to exercise a certain degree of discrimination when reading between the lines.

Despite his extreme popularity and the seemingly universal application of Hayden White's work on history, there is a fundamental statement to be found in White's writing on historical interpretation on the connection between literature and history that is useful here for this thesis. While it is not necessary to follow his claims on the understanding of historical narratives to its logical end, which would render history simply a form of fiction, it is still worthwhile to entertain the notion that the historical narrative possesses qualities of storytelling that involve input from its writer.⁵⁵ In this way, White implies an active role of the writer of historical narrative in his or her "emplotment" of factual events in order to grasp some meaning behind the events in question.⁵⁶ At this very basic level, White's theory supports the efforts of this thesis, in that here historiography will be viewed also in the historical context that it was written with attention as well to its principal actors- the historians themselves. This interpretation of the historical narrative as one which is determined by conscious decision making on its structure and presentation without reducing the events themselves to simple tools in the recounting of a story sets the tone for a close reading of text that looks for the historian's input without excessively attempting to interpret the individual writing the text.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 328-9.

⁵⁵ Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 61

The haphazard nature of the selection process, whose criteria is based on its potential relevance to an articulation of the issues stated above, if properly executed, can be counterbalanced through the presentation of their interconnectedness. This synthesis of disciplines in a wholesale analysis of texts in order to identify the discourse in which they communicate is the intended contribution to the scholarship. While one may always run the risk of overextending at the expense of reaching any depth of interpretation, both the small number of sources and the combination of both history and literature should serve as mutually reinforcing evidence of a greater discourse taking place, at any rate, between the lines.

Setting the Stage: Writing Under Kádárism

The following short introduction will attempt to sketch the widening boundaries of the socialist system in which intellectuals of the 1970s and 1980s functioned. It will focus on the historiography and literature in order to elucidate the plethora of discourses revolving around the omnipresent question of national identity in this period. It will also attempt to illuminate the gathering momentum in society from the fragmented liberty of the 1970s discourses on the nation to the more open discussion of the existential reasoning behind Hungarian socialism itself in the 1980s.

The very origins of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party and its Kádár regime were problematic for the legitimacy of its rule, a fact that greatly influenced its behavior in both the immediate aftermath of the Soviet intervention and in the following decades. Not only was its rise to power questionable in terms of its allegiance to Hungarian society, but its actual authority, as historian István György Tóth shows, required reworking: "there was one marked difference... At the end of the forties the Communist Party had represented a part of institutionalized state power, which it then turned into a terror soaked monocracy...After 1956, however, the chosen few of the armed intervention of a foreign power were obliged, in the absence of a 'ruling party,' to set about rebuilding both a state power on Soviet lines and a monocratic party."⁵⁷

In the longer term, the Kádár regime attempted to move beyond the mere justification of its political existence to legitimize its leadership role as guarantor of the interests of Hungarian society and the continued development of socialism within it. This required an image of the party and the regime not simply as a revolutionary force, but one that could be

⁵⁷ Tóth, *A Concise History of Hungary*, 599.

placed in the continuum of “Hungarian historical traditions”⁵⁸ despite the indication of the circumstances to the contrary. But in practical terms, the success of the party was dependent on its ability to produce material societal returns and an increase in living standards to achieve this essential stability. These small improvements facilitated through liberalizing economic measures of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) combined with a less repressive approach towards society⁵⁹ were the basis of the Kádár regime’s power. In return for such concessions in the improvement of daily life, society was expected to hold up its side of the bargain by “forgetting” the crimes of the past, constituting the so-called “compromise” around which the Kádár regime operated.⁶⁰

In addition to the problem of legitimacy of the Kádár regime among the aftereffects of 1956 was the reemergence of the national question. The character of the 1956 uprising had clearly national implications and incited a reengagement of Hungarian national identity within the confines of academia and official socialist philosophy. The demand for a reformulation of an already precarious definition of Hungary’s individual place in the greater socialist movement was duly provocative in state ideology and historiography.⁶¹ The urgency of the discourse on national identity, however, extended its reach beyond a debate among historians and philosophers into the larger public sphere and Hungarian society at large, thus bringing to light a concept long suppressed under socialism and degraded as a tendency counterproductive to the goals of the socialist movement.

⁵⁸ Edmund Gaspar, “Nationalism vs. Internationalism: Hungarian History in the Re-Making,” June 11, 1969, *Radio Free Europe Research, Open Society Archives 1956 Digital Archive*, 7.

⁵⁹ Tóth, *A Concise History of Hungary*, 607, 694.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 604. The irony, not the literal meaning implied by the word “compromise” is noted by most historians, such as Tóth. See also Fehér and Heller, *Hungary 1956 Revisited: The Message of a Revolution- a Quarter of a Century After* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), xi.

⁶¹ Gaspar, “Nationalism vs. Internationalism,” 3.

Despite the overall liberalizing societal trend in 1960s Hungary and the gradually increasing circulation of concepts and ideas, Kádárist Hungary did not simply continue on this steady trajectory into the following two decades without some degree of punctuation by reversals and reneging in political, cultural and economic matters. Due to economic pressures from the overall economic crisis of the 1970s and to directives radiating from Brezhnev in Moscow,⁶² Hungary witnessed in the early part of the decade a significant turnaround in economic policy and a “resumption of ideological warfare”⁶³ after the advent of the Prague Spring in 1968. Indeed for writers and academics, the “invisible censorship”⁶⁴ - termed so because in technical terms there has been no official censor in Hungary since the 19th century under Habsburg rule⁶⁵ - continued to function. Indeed the ossified “compromise” of Kádárist Hungary had widespread consequences for the whole of society, as the regime sought to continue actively applying socialist doctrine and maintain ties with the Soviet Union while remaining distant from the level of control exercised in the Rákosi period.

This is particularly evident in the ebbing and flowing of its cultural politics, such as the censorship policy of the so-called “Three Ts,”⁶⁶ which cleared the path for a more sensible treatment of society on the part of academics and writers. This threefold policy of support, toleration, and prohibition of publications instituted under Minister of Culture György Aczel⁶⁷, was largely unpredictable in its implementation and the reasoning behind the regime’s methodology. Yet in contrast to previous decades, where writing on particular subject matters was simply understood as unacceptable, this introduced a grey area with

⁶² Kontler, *Millennium in Europe*, 450.

⁶³ Ibid., 451.

⁶⁴ Tóth, *A Concise History of Hungary*, 606

⁶⁵ György Dalos, Archipel Gulasch: Die Entstehung der Demokratischen Opposition in Ungarn (Bremen: Donat & Temmen, 1986), 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 445.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 14.

regard to the consequences of writing a wider spectrum of topics.⁶⁸ Yet In the same way that the allowances of Kádárism did not afford any real institutionalized change in terms of rights and freedoms for society, or as Tóth comments, were “only permissions, and not inalienable fundamental rights of citizens,”⁶⁹ its policies left Hungarian writers and intellectuals largely in the dark to operate in a system that so clearly still did not value openness or diversity of opinion.

If the atmosphere of the 1960s was affected only largely cerebrally by such grand debates on historical materialism, Marxism, and the nation⁷⁰, by the 1970s, there emerged a number of noticeable changes in the cultural and academic spheres. In historiography, the period suggests not only a growing list of “acceptable” themes of research and publication, but also a diversification within historical schools themselves.⁷¹ Authors Apor and Trencsényi note, “within the framework of Hungarian historiography, doctrinaire Marxists, liberal Marxists, semi-dissenters, and anti-ideological neo-positivists were all present, and- of course, with a varying degree of institutional support- they could all publish their works regularly in the 70s and 80s”.⁷² While this statement clearly does not stand without qualification, it indicates the progression of intellectual trends in Hungary beyond the imposed inertia of Marxist doctrine of just a decade beforehand. Much the same flourishing and expansion of creative energies is observable within the Hungarian literary community in this period as well, whose early experiences with socialism in Hungary reflected the repressions and restraints of historiography discussed above.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15..

⁶⁹ Tóth, *A Concise History of Hungary*, 604.

⁷⁰ Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid, 6.

The historical community experienced a number of debates in the 1960s on the nature of Hungarian historiography and its relation to national identity, such as the well-known Molnár Erik Debate,⁷³ as well as the *Historikerstreit* around the collaborative production of Hungarian historians on a ten-volume *History of Hungary* largely inspired by Molnár's criticisms.⁷⁴ The notable divisions between the historical camps illustrate a departure from the one-dimensional interpretation of the so-called revolutionary progress school, or as they were more derogatorily known by their counter "objective factors school," the "dogmatic nationalists."⁷⁵ Here another tendency of historiography that clearly influenced the field is perceptible in this context: these discussions engage history in a way that goes above and beyond the direct functions of the subject itself, perhaps to an even greater degree in the Hungarian case than in others.⁷⁶ History was viewed not only as a series of events or linear flow of processes in the past, but was probed for its *meaning*, that is, the significance behind the events themselves. Thus these debates illustrate not only the overall societal conditions in which they occurred, but also the vast importance placed upon history as an indicator of national identity, whose accuracy was all the more crucial for the function afforded it. Historiography entailed a constant discursive analysis of not only *wie es eigentlich gewesen* but what that reality means- in this case, for the nation, and this composed a constant presence of ("historical") debate.⁷⁷

"After the revolution the essential problem facing the Party was to break the silence of writers and thereby make them implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the regime,"⁷⁸ states literary critic Lóránt Czigány in the *Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*. One obvious

⁷³ See: László Péter, "A Debate on the History of Hungary Between 1790 and 1945," *Slavonic and East European Review* 50 (1972).

⁷⁴ Péter, "A Debate on the History of Hungary," 442.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁷⁶ Szucs calls this a „Sonderheit” in his *Nation und Geschichte*, 17-18.

⁷⁷ Von Klimó, *Nation und Geschichte*, 17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

step in this attempt to induce writers to produce more and in doing so contribute to the regime's legitimacy building was to grant amnesty to those writers incarcerated at the start of the HSWP's existence. This occurred for writers in 1960 and was followed by a 1964 general amnesty for political prisoners.⁷⁹ The 1960s witnessed the return of its two pre-WWII dominant literary traditions based on the Western, cosmopolitan, avant-garde tendencies of the *Nyugat* generation(s) and the populist nationalist persuasion, both reentering the literary stage from their respective wings.⁸⁰ Thus Kádárism introduced a definitively new phase for literary life in Hungary for individual writers and achieved a partial renaissance of its previous manifold traditions, within which the multiple generations of urbanist *Nyugat* origins and the collection of Populist writers "lived in peaceful coexistence" in the 1960s and 1970s, publishing in a wide variety of journals.⁸¹

The extent of the importance of the urban-populist divide is visible in the 1980s not only as a literary phenomenon but as a point of departure for those involved in the developing opposition movements. This distinction extended into the political sphere as both the degree of radicalism in the strategies employed in deconstructing the socialist regime as well as the overall vision of a non-socialist Hungary were organized along these irreconcilable lines. This had widespread consequences for the political developments in the 1980s, as it formed an intellectual starting point for dissidents, who defined themselves as "Populist" or "Democratic" accordingly.⁸² The implication of such a designation was also a thematic one, associating the democratic or urbanist dissidents with a focus on human rights, placing less emphasis on nationalism and orienting themselves with Western culture, as opposed to the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe*, 447.

⁸² Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002), 125.

Populists, who focused on a contemporary translation of more “national” themes such as Hungarian minorities abroad, the protection of Hungarian culture and other “folkish” tendencies.⁸³ The relationship of the Populists and the Kádár regime was indeed one closer to compromise than that of their urbanist counterparts; their political position afforded them a greater degree of toleration and at time even active praise from the regime, which in turn affected their politics.⁸⁴

With a semblance of the intellectual and social environment in 1970s and 1980s Hungary, it is possible to proceed further into an analysis of the various textual sources on both the 19th century and contemporary Hungarian society, as well as those focused on Hungarian national minorities and their various contributions to the societal discourse on national identity and the stage that this discourse set for wider interpretations of a Hungarian nation outside the confines of an imposed socialist reality.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Chapter I. The Search for Original Truths and Fictions: The 19th Century as Historical and Literary Subject

Historical inquiry into the 19th century occupied the minds of many historians in the 1970s and 1980s, and played a crucial role in the growing discourse on national identity in shaping a comprehensive historiographic view of this past so relevant to the modern development of Hungary. A wealth of publications on the multifaceted foregone century in Hungary reflects the abundance of social, political and economic precedents and trends of a history *prior* to socialism; these were becoming increasingly more informative in the complex atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s, that, like the 19th century, seemed to defy categorization. The trends and evolutions identified through thorough analysis of Hungary in this period had by no means incorporated themselves into the completed chapters of Hungarian history. Quite the contrary; the 19th century was the period of historical research that, subjected to the discerning eye, revealed more continuities and parallels with the present day than most political actors of the 1970s and 1980s would care to admit.

The following analysis will address texts written in the 1970s and 1980s on the 19th century, focusing on studies related to the Reform Age and Revolution of 1848, the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire through the 1867 *Ausgleich*, and its subsequent period of Dualism leading up to the *fin de siècle*. They will shed some light on contemporary views of just how comprehensive Hungary's "modernization" really was, as well as the diversity of opinions regarding the legacy of Hungarian Liberalism, the creation of a Hungarian "bourgeoisie," and the significance of the Revolution as a break from "feudalism." These issues will also reveal the greater meaning of these writings when situated in their own

contemporary historical context, addressing the many unresolved issues originating in the 19th century that continued to affect Hungarian society over a century later- and will likewise be revisited in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Finally, subject to analysis, it becomes clear in many instances how these texts also speak to the conflicted nature of everyday life under Kádárism through their pinpointing of particular historical concepts, events, and figures.

Historiographic Considerations

Historiography in Hungary did not, as is to be expected, occur in a vacuum under socialism, though the tumult of events from the turn of the century onwards caused some significant changes to its composition. The evaluation and chronicling of the 19th century was made all the more crucial because of the connection of Hungarian historiographic traditions to the very events of this period, in point of fact centered primarily on a dichotomy formed around the *Ausgleich* of 1867. That is, historical schools were divided up according to political and confessional allegiance, forming Catholic, pro-Habsburg, pro-*Ausgleich* and Protestant, “independentist,” anti-*Ausgleich* groupings.⁸⁵ Apor and Trencsényi emphasize the importance of these two “master-narratives” in the extent of their influence on historians and historiography as well as their continuity, despite the transformations and interruptions precipitated by the events of the 20th century. This dual nature in historiography was not dismantled but was further complicated by the introduction of a third, 20th-century narrative: that of Marxism, which could be adopted to fit this scheme as “national Communist” history, thus carving a space in the 19th century for the legacy of a national struggle-albeit with a communist tint.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 2.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.

Therefore an “accurate” portrayal of the formative events of the 19th century was equaled in importance by their legacy upon which the historiography itself of course depended. This dynamic, added to by the introduction of the communist narrative as well as combinations of these original two “camps” with 20th-century event markers, was an ever-present function behind the discourse on the 19th century in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, while displaying the tendencies of one school over another is surely an indicator of one’s historical background, the innovation of historiographic methods necessitated by the precariousness of historical writing under socialism even in the 1970s or 1980s further complicates the narrative, thus giving all the more reason for observing the different interpretations and approaches to this well-known period.

A Short Word on Marxist Historiography vis-à-vis the 19th Century

The common thread throughout 19th century historical inquiry from a Marxist standpoint, rooted in historical materialism as it was, did not differ from that of non-Marxist historians in its attempt to locate the overcoming of feudalism and the entrance into a period of bourgeois capitalist development. For the Marxist historian, however, the focus on identification of a bourgeois society in the making was for the same purpose as identifying the downfall of liberalism; the development and dissolution of both were viewed as necessary precursors to the rise of socialism; that is, in order to set the stage for the rise of the proletariat.⁸⁷

Yet in many ways these 19th-century bourgeois traditions were adopted by socialism and integrated in the greater scheme of socialist development through simplification and rhetorical manipulation of events to fit what Trencsényi and Apor refer to as “dialectic

⁸⁷Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 4.

antagonisms.”⁸⁸ This amounted to the portrayal of figures and events worthy of veneration or dismissal according to their designation as “revolutionary” or “progressive,” as opposed to “regressive,” that is, against the flow of revolutionary progress. This method of posing national figures as innate carriers of socialist values developed under Stalin was still prevalent even in the 1970s and 1980s, though the Molnárían accusations of Hungarian Marxist historiography’s “*revolutionary optimism*,”⁸⁹ in the 1960s had diffused this somewhat. The understanding of Marxist revolution in general, however, clearly influenced the interpretation of the event, and is subject to contrast with other views on revolution from other perspectives on the ideological spectrum.

1848 : Lessons and Perceptions of Reform and Revolution

The Moses of the Hungarians, irresponsible popularity-hunter, politician of grievances, successful statesman of the lesser nobility, a nobleman in defense of the privileges, and inconsistent revolutionary...

- On the many interpretations of liberal reform leader Lajos Kossuth in “Kossuth-Images and their Contexts” by Iván Zoltan Denes⁹⁰

The study of 1848-9 engaged historians in the production of a narrative on a period of heightened national consciousness and reform whose effects were crucial to the development of Hungarian national identity. The liberal legacy of the Reform Age and the revolution that followed provided both the historical precedent of a Hungarian movement ostensibly dedicated to the fostering of rights and liberties of the members of its society and set the tone for the second half of the 19th century marked by the atmosphere of “compromise.” The immediate relevance for later developments was undoubtedly a foremost consideration; the historically understood term “compromise” had accrued an even more loaded meaning by the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, as historian Iván Zoltán Denes notes, discovering the

⁸⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁹ Péter, “A Debate,” 444.

⁹⁰ Iván Zoltán Denes, “Kossuth- Images and their Contexts,” Forthcoming, 18.

history of this period could provide a distinctly positive message in connecting the two centuries, despite the undeniable setbacks of the latter half of the 19th century, in expressing the “conviction that an independent and democratic Hungary was desirable and possible, and the efforts made for it could not and did not sink into oblivion.”⁹¹

The following texts will address the problems of *embourgeoisement* at its very beginnings and the conflict of interests for the nobility behind the liberal reforms, subjecting the liberal reform period to historical adjudication for its viability and searching for socio-economic connections between these beginnings and modern Hungarian conditions. The nationalities situation is presented here in a similar fashion of evaluating the performance of liberal nationalism, but also draws eventual moral parallels with contemporary society. Together, these approaches not only lend relevance to the period for contemporary society, but illuminate the wholeness of its 19th century society with as much accuracy as possible, shedding new light on the complexities of its history.

Embourgeoisement, Part I: A Process Incomplete

Hungarian, of course, meant a gentleman, and of the more backward variety at that.

-Peter Hanák, describing the 19th Century Hungarian nobility in “The Bourgeoisification of the Hungarian Nobility- Reality and Utopia in the 19th Century,” 1986⁹²

The term *embourgeoisement*, or “bourgeoisification,” is employed by a number of scholars dealing with the 19th. Since the goal of society is described as overcoming feudal structures, the object of interest is locating the nature and extent of the transition to a society based on bourgeois values and the economic rise of a middle class in Hungary. This extent had its own implications, to begin with, for future development - as it was evidence against

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Péter Hanák, “The Bourgeoisification of the Hungarian Nobility- Reality and Utopia in the 19th Century,” *Etudes historiques hongroises* 1985 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985), 404.

the notion of Hungary's insurmountable "backwardness" in proving that Hungary was already on the road to a modern capitalist society before the interruptions at the turn of the century. Furthermore, with regard to the appearance of the term *embourgeoisement*, the reality of its articulation is perhaps equally significant to the discussion of its details. The term *embourgeoisement* is, significantly, also used in reference to the character of the Kádár regime in the 1960s, whose liberalized economic policies allowed for some improvement in Hungarian living standards.⁹³ Addressing the contemporary period as one pursuing the direction of bourgeoisification is by its definition theoretically incompatible with the economic goals of socialism; the parallel itself is indicative of the contradictory nature of Kádárism. It may be helpful to view these works in this light as well, as part of a greater discourse aware of the weight of this term.⁹⁴

A socio-economic evaluation of this period oriented towards creating an accurate and comprehensive view of 19th-century society identifies in *embourgeoisement* first and foremost its incomplete nature. The nobility, or those of this complex strata responsible for the drive towards achieving a bourgeois society lacked the crucial economic response; at this point in the 19th century, most landowning nobility were simply not "capitalist in spirit,"⁹⁵ as socio-economic historian Péter Hanák explains in "The Bourgeoisification of the Hungarian Nobility- Reality and Utopia in the 19th Century". Despite this economic shortcoming, however, what is important is the existence of the civic values attached to the bourgeois culture the nobility sought to adopt, which Hanák says originated in a reception of Enlightenment ideas already in the early 19th century.⁹⁶ The nature of both social and

⁹³ Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe*, 437.

⁹⁴ Apor and Trencsényi, "Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past" 34.

⁹⁵ Hanák, "Bourgeoisification of the Hungarian Nobility," 408.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 404.

economic factors is emphasized by his heading “Along the Path of Bourgeois Virtue”⁹⁷, signifying also the gradually increasing noble commitment to “liberty and property”⁹⁸.

It is in such values of “liberty and property” of the liberal nobility and their societal vision, and not in the emphasis of underdevelopment, that helps to characterize the Reform Age in a way that highlights the complexity of liberal thought rather than the inevitable dissolution of their own foundational socioeconomic structures. Here the writing of András Gerő, in whose historiography has been noted by Apor and Trencsényi a “reconsideration of the traditional historiographical image of liberal nationalism in the Reform Age”⁹⁹, that such a thematization takes place. Gerő, in his “Industrial Development in the Eyes of Opposition Reformers in the 1840s”, expands on the idea of *embourgeoisement* discussed by Hanák, stating that its purpose for Hungarian liberal reformers was in fact no less than “the creation of a civil society”.¹⁰⁰ While his chapter focuses primarily on economic aspirations, Gerő echoes the sentiments of Hanák that the social and the economic are inextricable and were treated so by Hungarian liberals. Therefore economic benefit was attributed to a creation of a “spirit of association”¹⁰¹ for the buildup of a Hungarian society. This association in turn functions in the same way as economic progress, which to Hungarian liberals was equated with liberation from an absolutist monarchical system.

Such evaluations that note the nobility’s “utopian” vision of its own *embourgeoisement*¹⁰² do not write off its supporters to the inevitable tides of history or underestimate the historical necessity of this development for the second half of the 19th century. Rather, they magnify the liberal association of freedom of the individual and of the

⁹⁷ “Bourgeoisification of the Hungarian Nobility,” 404.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 405.

⁹⁹ Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 35.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰² Ibid, 404.

entire nation with economic progress, with the result that these two concepts remain mutually informing in not only evaluations of the 19th century but in view of the goals of liberalism in general. As Gerő states, this was not just a power struggle; this link of “conscious economic development with “national autonomy and progress”¹⁰³ is the root of the liberal vision.¹⁰⁴ That is, if *embourgeoisement* is understood as the fulfillment of an economic status equated with the fulfillment of civic values, this implies that the logical end of capital development is in fact the realization of political emancipation.

This view can be compared to that of György Ránki and Iván Berend, whose goal of tracing economic progress in Hungary is evident in the title, *Hungary: A Century of Economic Development* from 1974. Yet it is interesting that they state clearly that the “prime social consequence” of the bourgeois transformation process is the “emergence of a proletariat”¹⁰⁵. Their assertion, therefore, that “the historical turning-point in the modern capitalist transformation of the Hungarian economy is bound up with the revolution of 1848-9”¹⁰⁶, is compatible with Hanák’s and Gerő’s analyses. However, a measurement of progress, both economic and *social*-based on the development of a working class- speaks little to the vision of society and the value system of *embourgeoisement* mentioned above. Rather, the talk here is of preparation for the inevitable proletarian revolution.

A genuine interest becomes clear in the texts of Gerő and Hanák in comprehending Hungarian *society* to the fullest extent possible as well, not simply as an assessment of where Hungary’s development went awry, while being realistic about the remnants of feudalism after 1848 and throughout the 19th century. This emphasis on civil society and civic liberties

¹⁰³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Iván Berend and György Ránki, eds., *Hungary: A Century of Economic Development* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), 77.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15.

also shows that the 19th century possessed such bourgeois values not in vain, but as an investment in the long-term transformation of Hungarian society- this was, in a way, no less than the “birth of the Hungarian liberal opposition”¹⁰⁷. As Gerő aptly states, “The fact is that individual elements of reform fitted into each other like cog-wheels...”¹⁰⁸ reflecting the depth and intricacy- and also legitimacy- of the liberal vision.

In light of the manifold disruptions to these initial attempts in the century to follow, Hanák’s and Gerő’s texts contain also the implication that that which was initiated in this period could indeed reach completion, under the proper social circumstances. For indeed the incompleteness referred to here does not have as a logical consequence an indefinite inability to achieve these ends, and in the portrayal of both historians the *embourgeoisement* scenario remains an attractive one. When this view is applied to present-day Hungary, it is significant to note that in the eyes of Gerő and Hanák, the course has already been set in motion. The liberal tradition is present, and was not eradicated by revolutionary failure, territorial losses, fascism or two World Wars. This is a retrievable historical thread, then, perhaps even for the vaguely *embourgeois*-ing Hungarian society of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Nationalities “Problem”

To face, in a sober way, the problems of the past- painful though this may be- is essential if the problems of the present are to be overcome...I am, however, firmly convinced that no historian worth the name can yield to pressure which calls for a one-sided portrayal of the past- no matter where this pressure comes from and how strong it is.

-György Spira, Preface, *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848-49*¹⁰⁹

Both the credibility of the efforts and the effectiveness of the entire liberal movement seemed to meet its boundaries on the issue of the “nationalities” in Hungary. A discussion on national minorities in any time period was not easily ignored in the 1970s and 1980s, and the

¹⁰⁷ Denes, “Kossuth-Images and their Contexts,” 15.

¹⁰⁸ Gerő, “Industrial Development,” 40.

¹⁰⁹ György Spira, *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848-49* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 106.

findings of historians as to how and why the nationalities question proved to be such a debacle in the 1848-49 period also point to varying responses to the burning question of how to handle an issue that clearly remained unresolved even into the present day. It was in fact not until the latter part of the 1970s that the problem of Hungarian minorities in neighboring socialist countries such as Czechoslovakia and Romania broke through to the level of Hungarian foreign policy. This issue, which despite its simmering presence in society went largely ignored by the Kádár regime, was at least in appearance adopted onto its agenda by the late 1970s, although in substance such developments contributed little to inducing any real change in the conditions of those living under the dictatorial regime. The historical criticism leveled against the reformers of 1848-9, as well as the narrative which tells of the dissolution of Magyar and non-Magyar unity by the insidious intrigues of the more powerful and repressive entity represented by the Habsburgs, drew a wealth of parallels with the relationship of Hungary to the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

The nationalities question sets once again the legacy of liberal reformers as the target of critique, and in the case of this crucial issue in the Revolution of 1848, its leader Lajos Kossuth. The role of this question in the rapid loss of support among non-Magyar populations in Hungary that sealed the fate of the 1848 Revolution is presented to some extent by all authors here as a strategic failure. The question centers largely not on this reality but on the external factors leading to this historical blunder, for the degree of criticism towards the liberal reformers' handling of the situation is more indicative of the merit granted by the author to liberal nationalism in general seen through the lens of this event. To this end, one may observe the image of Kossuth and the constituency he represents as a self-styled trailblazer ignorant of the severity of tensions brewing between Magyars and non-Magys who, upon this realization, does nothing in the way of negotiation to resolve it. He and his co-

liberals may also be presented as less at fault, but still largely naïve with regards to the power of Habsburg intervention to defeat the revolution from within. Alternatively, the blame on Kossuth and the liberals may be minimized in light of Habsburg power and in the unwillingness of nationalities to negotiate themselves. These three essential arguments are identified in three authors here, whose positions also reveal a deeper commentary on the legacy and worth of liberalism based in this period.

This criticism, linked with the insurmountable internal conflict of the nobility in its attempts to bourgeoisify itself and that attacks the nature of liberal nationalism as a worthless and unimaginative construct is present in the analysis of György Spira, whose quote featured above conveys the cautionary message that characterizes his *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848-49*. The lessons of the past he seems to propagate here are based in the lack of foresight of Lajos Kossuth and the majority of liberals (with the exception of Széchenyi) on the matter for the origins of the Revolution's demise. Spira finds it inexcusable that they failed to see the crucial nature of the situation, focusing instead on another well-grounded but ultimately irrational fear of a peasant rebellion: "the Hungarian liberals stubbornly refused to admit that the discontent among the non-Magyars who regarded the achievement of their own goals to be at least as important as the achievements of the revolution posed a threat no less serious than the possible discontent among the serfs should serfdom not be abolished."¹¹⁰ Therefore he formulates his criticism based on the economic fears of the liberal reformers as a noble class against the peasant masses, when the awareness of the problem should have been rooted in national consciousness of the non-Magyar population around them; the class antagonistic tone is difficult to avoid in the argument Spira puts forward.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

Locating his argument in between these two sides of the spectrum and basing his judgment of the liberal decision-making during this period on the strategic missteps against the overwhelming presence of an outside political force, György Szabad's formulation in his *Hungarian Political Trends Between the Revolution and the Compromise (1849-1867)* from 1977 states the well-known fact that ¹¹¹ the Habsburgs were "always hovering in the wings"¹¹², that is, ready and able to take advantage of any weakness or moment of hesitation expressed on behalf of Hungarian reformers. Meanwhile Spira, who acknowledges the Habsburg threat, knowing its strength was in the loyalty of peasant populations seems to imply was nevertheless entirely surmountable. This is a telling statement, when combined with the epigraph in this section, as it is clear that while Spira obviously considers the lack of proactive policies on behalf of the Hungarian liberals in preventing the crisis as a genuine fatal mistake and the ultimate culprit, Szabad is aware of the difficulties of the Hungarian liberals' environment.

Gerő, in stark contrast to Spira's accusatory evaluation of the handling of the nationalities question, represents this sympathetic view towards the liberals, asserting just as strongly in his "Politics and National Minorities, 1848-9," that "the complex issue...cannot be reduced to a conflict between the inflexible minorities policy of a Hungarian government out of touch with both reality and legitimate nationalist claims".¹¹³ That is, the blame in the denouement of 1848-9 is in Gerő's view is also on minorities and their own "stubbornness" in the face of larger political considerations. According to Gerő, their refusal to see the bigger picture was ultimately as destructive as the belatedness of the Hungarian government's

¹¹¹ András Gerő, "Politics and National Minorities, 1848-9" in *Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience*, ed. András Gerő (Budapest: CEU Press, 1993), 97-8.

¹¹² Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 8

¹¹³ Gerő, "Politics and National Minorities", 98

response to what he sees as largely inappropriate demands, as was the role of the Habsburgs in manipulating the nationalities from within Hungary.

It is interesting here for the purpose of contrast with Gerő's statements to refer to the 1969 work "On the Possibilities of Integration of the Peoples of Hungary in the Years 1848-9" by Sándor Merei. The year of publication clearly precludes this discussion, but for this very reason provides an excellent illustration of the stark difference of an approach like Gerő's- and for that matter, all authors listed above- versus that of Merei's Marxist undertones. He states, "The class bondage explains the erroneous perspective of the humane-thinking, liberal nobles, that they demanded, in the interest of reconciliation and collaboration, and in the interest of the common struggle against the feudal-absolutist Viennese governmental system, that later became the standard bearers of counterrevolutionary repression, the most possible 'concessions' from their fellow nobility for the non-Hungarian population of Hungary."¹¹⁴ This quote implies that bourgeois nationalism contains an inherent contradiction- something Gerő actually speaks of in his chapter- but that just like the nobility "failed" in 1848, so liberal nationalism itself is destined to failure. Only Spira's rhetoric comes close to such a judgment. Hence Gerő's defense of sorts is then even more meaningful in that it is supporting the feasibility and usefulness of *liberal nationalism* as a tenet of the entire liberal movement. This is not to say that Gerő's text is written in opposition to the national claims of minorities within Hungary during the Revolution, but rather that in addition to his recognition of the role of outside factors and shortsightedness in other areas, his text insists on the relevance of adhering to a liberal tradition. Just as his writings on *embourgeoisement* reflect certain optimism with regard to

¹¹⁴ Sándor Merei, „Über die Möglichkeiten eines Zusammenschlusses der Ungarn lebenden Völker in den Jahren 1848-1849“ *Studia historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 15 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969), 254.

the virtues of liberal reform, so here he rejects the notion that liberal nationalism is fundamentally incompatible with the maintenance of domestic peace and stability even with the presence of other minorities.

While the shift in emphasis in Szabad's assessment of the nationalities situation towards one of relations with the third party Habsburgs gives a more ambiguous final evaluation of liberalism in general, Spira's perspective contains a tone of warning against a repetition of more powerful outside force that can capitalize on the hesitations of the leadership and utilize its ability to infiltrate and counteract the domestic efforts at promoting national cohesion. It is not difficult to imagine the possible transposition of this situation onto Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s, and as he seems to insinuate here, such liberal tenets are not fit to deal with the challenges presented in either century.

The Multiplicity of Compromise

The patrimonial political system ensured that the country's political establishment was made up of dependent and easily controllable individuals.

Description of political atmosphere under Dualism, in "Mamelukes and Zoltans- Elected Representatives under the Dual Monarchy," by András Gerő, 1986.¹¹⁵

Historiography on the *Ausgleich* and the period of Dualism present a variety of interpretations of the meaning of the word "compromise" that had also come to characterize contemporary Hungarian society in the 1970s and 1980s. The timeliness of the concept and the pejorative meaning attached to both periods' experiences with *Ausgleich* added to the relevance of research on Hungary in this period. A particularly pressing question for the future of socialist Hungarian society revealed itself with regard to the character of this compromise; the well-known fate of both Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had clear implications for both periods marked by suppressed revolutions, restoration, and

¹¹⁵ Gerő, András, "Mamelukes and Zoltans- Elected Representatives under the Dual Monarchy," in *Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience*, ed. András Gerő (Budapest: CEU Press, 1993), 117-18.

relative quiet. Most importantly, research on the unequal relationship between Hungary and its absolutist partner under the Dual Monarchy carried value not only as an at times symbolic representation of that which characterized modern-day relations with the Soviet Union, but also as a genuine inquiry into the precedents set by Hungarian political experiences in this period.

Thus these works also address the politicking necessitated in this period in Hungarian relations with Austria, as well as the ways in which Hungarian society both suffered setbacks but legitimately developed its own separate scheme in political, social and cultural life despite its participation in a “dual” monarchy. To this end, the historiographic theme of *embourgeoisement* returns in these works, enabling a discussion of comparisons between capital cities Budapest and Vienna, which act as representations of both separate and distinct societies.

While not one of the texts here claims an unacknowledged equality between the two monarchies of Hungary and Austria or looks to the *Ausgleich* as a positive development in Hungarian history, it is again a question of degree that influences the texts here with regard to the portrayals of society and the elements their respective authors choose to emphasize. A common theme is the almost translatable quality of the problems of the *Ausgleich* period with the “compromise” of contemporary Hungary from a variety of perspectives. Reflections on the geopolitical positioning of Hungary and the influence of international affairs in the decision making processes of Hungarian liberals in the period between the Revolution and the *Ausgleich* are, not surprisingly, the focus of the political historian György Szabad in *Hungarian Political Trends, 1848-1867*. His focus is the period leading to the *Ausgleich*, or

the “constitutionalism through despotic means-”¹¹⁶ clearly reflective of his own historiographic positioning on the *Ausgleich*. This negative portrayal reflects Szabad’s Protestant independentist leanings,¹¹⁷ which undoubtedly this influenced his opinion on contemporary matters as well. Szabad is critical of Deák’s lack of political foresight, and is not very forgiving towards his compromised position as an insider to the situation.

In this spirit he traces the attempts of the mostly exiled participants in the Revolution while also emphasizing the importance of outside influences and the need to garner international attention for their cause. The implications of this discussion are easily applied to the present-day situation in Hungary in their almost universal moral; based on this experience, Szabad is convinced that small countries cannot act without both situational advantage and the sanctioning of a more powerful ally.¹¹⁸ He also notes that in the final analysis reformers “had to realize that the Great Powers of Europe desired the Habsburg Empire to remain intact”¹¹⁹. The primacy of the international situation and the will of “great powers” which were clearly still a reality in 1970s and 1980s Europe, were, according to Szabad, not to be ignored. Ultimately, Hungary was “abandoned”¹²⁰ by the Great Powers; this was not the last time this would occur, and while Szabad refers in the final line of his text to the First World War, this theme was bound to repeat itself in the 20th century.

His many references to the exploits of the exiled community punctuate what already appears as a long protracted struggle between eminently moral, democratic motives and a nearly defunct, oppressive system. Szabad also notes how few problems have been resolved in the over a century between the two periods and gleans his lesson from the experience that

¹¹⁶ Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 148.

¹¹⁷ Apor and Trencsényi, “Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past,” 34.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 161.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 161.

all the nationalities could have banded together once again to defeat the Habsburgs, but they were too engaged in a struggle against one another.¹²¹ He supports this with a description of the Danube Confederation, “this planned league of nations”¹²² that by the 1850s the exiles had formulated. It is quite clear what Szabad is insinuating about the present day through mention and description of the Danube Confederation from this period:

...the planned Danubian Confederation-unlike any kind of compromise contemplated to that point-, and unlike the one later realized- was not a pact with an oppressor, but an alliance made on the basis of the democratically expressed free choice of equal partners. The Danubian confederation was to have been an alliance in which each of the nations who had joined it for mutual aid in the safeguarding of their hard-won liberty would have remained totally autonomous, and thus free to withdraw at any point. There are probably few examples more illustrative of the differences between the political points of view of Kossuth and Deák... in the extent of their recognition of the real trend of historical development.¹²³

The likening of the Danubian confederation to the failed League of Nations is but one of many thematic parallels to be drawn between the 19th- and 20th-century compromise experiences. The work of Hungarian exiles that Szabad describes during the period leading up to the *Ausgleich* is highly similar to those strategies seen among Hungarian émigrés in the 1970s and 1980s, and of course also to those forced to flee Hungary after the suppression of the Revolution in 1956. The efforts of Hungarians abroad to garner international attention for the status of Hungarian minorities in neighboring socialist countries and to further the human rights reflects the publicistic methods of Kossuth and others described here. These concerns were much the same for émigrés in the 1970s and 1980s, as they attempted to make a case for their own solutions to the national minorities issue.

The inability to assert Hungarian interests with Vienna is related to the political assessment of the negative effects of the *Ausgleich* in Hungary itself, which Gerő expounds in “Marmelukes and Zoltans- Elected Representatives in the Habsburg Monarchy”. Gerő,

¹²¹ Ibid., 8.

¹²² Ibid., 57.

¹²³ Ibid., 131.

who in his writings tends to emphasize the value of the efforts of the liberals of the Reform Era, expresses disillusionment at the alleged parliamentary practices of this period. His narrative expresses the somewhat chaotic nature of the “politics” in post-1867 Hungary, which, despite the plurality of parties and the attempt at increased representation of its population through enfranchisement, is hardly liberal in character. Gerő opens his discussion entitled “The Chosen Ones” with the assertion that the Hungarian parliament, despite the rhetoric on bourgeois transformation and efforts to change its composition, remained under the control of the landed nobility.¹²⁴ The overall lack of change despite a new form of governance, a revolution, and a new wave of parties does not paint a positive picture, but it indeed had resonance with regard to the irritating sense of continuity Gerő puts forth here. He describes the criteria for political popularity: “political imprisonment or exile during the years of absolutist repression that followed the defeat of the Hungarian revolution and Freedom Fight were now invaluable in forwarding one’s career”, as such individuals were “now revered as national heroes and enjoyed the wholehearted support of the population”.¹²⁵ Such battle scars also had relevance in the 20th century as a means of furthering political careers, as did closeness to the establishment.¹²⁶

His pinpointing of the hypocrisies of the Liberal era under Dualism are, however, not exclusively tied to their 19th-century context. The Kádár regime, which, while not fashioning itself as a multiparty parliamentary system, was often accused of carrying on the negative traditions of the previous decade after the consolidation in 1956- despite the creation of a new party, and with many of the usual suspects. Gerő’s presentation of these characters reflects with scholarly clarity just how uncomfortably close two periods separated by over a century

¹²⁴Gerő, “Mamelukes and Zoltans,” 109.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 118.

were in the uncanny similarity of their “compromises”. As stated earlier, the problem of legitimacy based on breaks and continuities with the past was a major challenge for the Kádár regime. He and his colleagues were, just as much as the “Mamelukes and Zoltans”, children of an *Ausgleich*, whose behavior was defined by the circumstances of their political origins.

In this same direction of evaluating the lasting achievements of Hungarian reform in terms of resulting political structures after the *Ausgleich*, Attila Pok’s “New State Structure in Hungary after the *Ausgleich*” thesis addresses the legal and political mechanisms behind the *Ausgleich* and its effects in Hungary. The *Ausgleich*, which while by both sides regarded as somehow the “golden middle way between absolutism and revolution” or an avoidance of “total disaster”, according to Pok, from the start was “an illusion in no small measure”.¹²⁷ He traces the debate over local, decentralized government in Hungary under the Dual Monarchy versus the creation of a more centralized system, which he says occupied a place next to the nationalities question and the relationship to Austria as one of the most pressing issues of post-*Ausgleich* Hungary.¹²⁸ In the quest for the establishment of a *bürgerlicher Staat*, Pok shows, the Hungarian situation was complicated by the unique role of the feudal governmental structure of the Hungarian counties as a simultaneous center of noble control and a protective mechanism against absolutism.

Pok demonstrates through this discussion that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was hardly a step in the right direction, not in terms of Austrian political progress, but for the otherwise modernizing trajectory of Hungarian politics, which, it seems, would have done well without Austrian intervention. The varied and often conflicting roles of the county system and its potential uses posed a challenge to liberal reformers by the very fact that

¹²⁷ Attila Pok, “New State Structure Habsburg Empire: New Administration after the *Ausgleich* in Hungary,” in *Gesellschaft, Politik und Verwaltung in der Habsburger Monarchie, 1830-1918*, ed. Ferenc Glatz (Budapest: Adademiai Kiadó, 1986), 192.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 192

“freedom wasn’t to be exercised in bourgeois, individual rights, but in municipal self-government”¹²⁹. This not only hindered the development of liberal values in practice but was once again attributable to the unequal Austrian-Hungarian relationship. He states,

It is an anachronism of dualism that in Austria, which was not a so-called constitutional state before the *Ausgleich*, that the freedoms and rights of citizens were not just declared but also supported with a *Reichsgericht* in the 1867 December constitution in the 1867... Whereas in Hungary, where the tradition of constitutional procedures was deeply rooted, with exception of the freedom of the press and religion, there was neither systematic codification of civil and political rights nor was it possible address grievances in a court.¹³⁰

Pok’s article is not resolutely political, but it enables him to comment on relations between Hungary and Austria in the paradigm of governance. This also affords him the opportunity to exercise criticism on political forms and note their entrenchment in Hungary. Pok, however, discusses the details of Hungarian governance under Dualism to treat it as its own separate entity. The depth of discussion on the Hungarian role, diminished or not, in the Monarchy and the existing structures within Hungary prior to the *Ausgleich* not only serves to point out the stark differences from Austria, but presents Hungary on a different trajectory outside simple subordination to a larger Empire. Hungary was best left to its own devices to devise its own ultimate structure of government to meet its own needs.

Embourgeoisement, Part II: Budapest and Vienna

The close of this section looks once again to *embourgeoisement*, this time in the measure of urbanization. A socioeconomic assessment addressing the fin de siècle in Hungary, and particularly the urban center, portrays an entirely different sense of development than the above negative portrayals of the political aftereffects of the *Ausgleich*. While again the writings of Hanák address the bourgeois culture and the extent of its development, it is now embodied in the form of a city and allows for comparison with Viennese society. Moreover, the liberal values first referenced in his writings on

¹²⁹ Ibid., 194

¹³⁰ Ibid., 195

embourgeoisement are further developed here and realized in the urban center Budapest, where Hanák locates the crux of bourgeois society. This view not only addresses liberal culture, it presents a much fuller picture of society than any of the above stated works, and derives the strength of its comparisons with Vienna from this.

Hanák returns to the concept behind the necessary development of capitalism in order to foster the development of the modern city in “*Embourgeoisement and Urbanization: A Comparison of the City Development of Vienna and Budapest*”, but continues by emphasizing that the modern city is dependent on the development of a civic *culture* as well.¹³¹ The 19th-century city was, as the center of *embourgeoisement*, “increasingly a formative factor (*Gestaltungsfacktor*) and model image for the lifestyle and modes of thinking of the whole society”.¹³² For Hanák, the final verdict on Budapest’s development is also that it was a “conscious formation of a city”¹³³ that did not occur “thanks to the charity protectionism of princely absolutism” (as its counterpart readily shows) but actually as part of its “*Nationalwerden* under the guidance of oppositional liberal nobles”.¹³⁴ Hanák goes on to describe the parallel process of development in Vienna, where the city also embodied the socioeconomic structures of the time, showing that in contrast to Budapest, Vienna’s physical layout reflected the divisions in its own society, and can in this regard be seen as somewhat behind Budapest in terms of its bourgeois development and the active attempts it undertook to avoid confrontation with capitalism.

In doing so, Hanák portrays Budapest in this role of the urban center as a bastion of modernity, and, more importantly, investigates the *image* of the modern, bourgeois nation

¹³¹Péter Hanák, “*Embourgeoisement and Urbanization: A Comparison of the City Development of Vienna and Budapest*,” in *Gesellschaft, Politik und Verwaltung in der Habsbruger Monarchie, 1830-1918*, ed. Ferenc Glatz (Budapest: Adademiai Kiadó, 1986), 203

¹³² Ibid., 203.

¹³³ Hanák, “*Embourgeoisement and Urbanization*,” 211.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

that it represented in this period. “The Garden and the Workshop (Reflections on the fin de siècle Culture of Vienna and Budapest)” from 1989 delves into the world of the Viennese “garden”- meant to symbolize the angst-driven, decadent withdrawal from the decay and dissolution of society- to illustrate the mentality of its intellectuals and artists in this period. With this image of Vienna, he juxtaposes the image of the Budapest “workshop” to convey the contrasting industriousness and enthusiasm of its creative *Zeitgeist*.¹³⁵ One is confronted with a self-reflexive, introspective literary and artistic community, mirroring the society which it strives to inspire. Hardly victims or passive actors in a historical process, the participants of the Budapest “workshop” would take the fate of this nation into their own hands, basing their kind of construction of a new society on the very ruins of the old. This is in sharp contrast to the decaying, declining imperial city to which Budapest was mentally subordinated.

A final point is the composition of this urban bourgeoisie. These very elements behind the avant-garde movement and the greater fin de siècle cultural scene were by and large of a highly cosmopolitan, urban persuasion. Indeed, it was Budapest’s Jews, Germans and other “foreigners” that contributed to the movements.¹³⁶ It was *this* urban bourgeoisie that was engaged in decrying “its outmoded past, symbolized by the feudal mansion”¹³⁷, a kind of turn of the century version of the *natio Hungarica*. To remain by the point of national consciousness as a liberal concept, the essential remnants of national identity are carried on, if anywhere, in these “cosmopolitan”¹³⁸ milieus. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie “dissolved the dilemma of Hungarian provincialism and European foreignness... The new popular national

¹³⁵ Péter Hanák, “The Garden and the Workshop Reflections on the fin de siècle Culture of Vienna and Budapest)” in *Hungary and European Civilization*, eds. György Ránki and Attila Pok Indiana University Studies on Hungary, vol 3 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989) 216.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

ideal was East-Central European, at one and the same time Danubian and European”¹³⁹. Though this vibrancy is portrayed at the fin de siècle, it is only logical that similar elements could do much of the same in contemporary society.

A Sojourn Into the Literary: The Petőfi “Cult” as an “Embedded” Poetic Function

As a figure of independence, the poet Sándor Petőfi was and has remained throughout Hungarian history one of the most important national historical and literary personas. The personage of Petőfi, as von Klimó shows, was elevated beyond the status of a historical example to that of a historical and literary cult; his figure transcended the divisions on the interpretation of 1848 and was a symbol for conservatives and liberals alike in the 19th century. Petőfi “merged succinctly the message of the national –revolutionary and the romantic interpretation of Hungarian history”¹⁴⁰ and quickly became an immortal figure among writers and poets in Hungary, even in the present day. The importance of Petőfi, second only- according to von Klimó- to that of Lajos Kossuth¹⁴¹ is palpable in the various undertakings in his name already in the 19th century, such as the Petőfi Society or the Petőfi Monument in Budapest.¹⁴²

Yet such acts of veneration were, as von Klimó shows, naturally laden with political and in some cases also religious significance, evoking a particular image of the national poet in harmony with greater ideological aims. Thus the Petőfi cult itself contains a sense of ambiguity and malleability. Petőfi’s radicalism, fascination with the French Revolution- and all revolutions in general- and his unwillingness to negotiate with “reactionary” Habsburg

¹³⁹ Ibid, 229-30.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 35

¹⁴¹ Von Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*, 79.

¹⁴² Ibid., 83, 91.

politics, all fit well into a socialist scheme of revolutions in the name of freedom.¹⁴³ At the same time, Petőfi functions as a bourgeois hero for his embodiment of the Hungarian nation, the figure who stood for the Hungarian poor and disenfranchised against the elitist aristocracy.¹⁴⁴

As a figure of 1848, whose own revolutionary legacy remained a center of debate even in the 20th century, the adoption of the symbol and the near “sacralization” of Petőfi were not without controversy and conflict. Celebrations of 15 March and its protagonist became a symbol of stark protest against the regime once again in the 1980s as the struggle to reinstate 15 March as a public holiday resurfaced,¹⁴⁵ and it was not until 1989 that such demonstrations occurred without conflict between demonstrators and the state.

More instructive here in locating Petőfi’s presence as an explicitly national figure in the 1970s and 1980s is not to search for him in the volumes of history, but rather to consult his literary influence on contemporary writers and poets. Indeed, poetic formulations on the nation, as already referenced in the introduction, are well-rooted in Hungary. A specific tie to Romanticism is to be found with this function of Hungarian poetry, and as critic Kenneth McRobbie adds: “It is well-known that since 1848 writers and intellectuals in Eastern Europe have been regarded as spokesmen for ‘the people,’ ‘independence,’ ‘justice,’- however elusive these proved to be in reality.”¹⁴⁶ Petőfi is credited with such effective political activity precisely for this synthesis of poetic authority and political conviction. He was able to act as the “nation’s prophet” by formulating its needs, desires, and grievances through the medium of his verse. Hence the Petőfi figure, not only in its historical cult form, represents this important mandate of Hungarian poetry. While some of this tendency was lost in the 20th

¹⁴³ Gaspar, “Nationalism vs. Internationalism: Hungarian History in the Re-Making,” 5.

¹⁴⁴ von Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 404.

¹⁴⁶ McRobbie, “Towards Renewal of a Democratic Poetics,” 397 .

century, the sensitivity and insights of poets in relation to national identity were often simply embedded and personalized in a modern form, focusing primarily on the individual and his or her relationship to society.¹⁴⁷ Thus we may look to some poets and writers from the 1970s and 1980s that adopted this Petőfi function, as it were, into their own works.

An interesting modern example is poet and dissident György Petri, whom McRobbie ties not only to Petőfi but to fin de siècle poet Endre Ady. The strength behind Ady's statements on the Hungarian nation and his concerns for the present situation permeate his work and his legacy; Petri, in the eyes of critic McRobbie, channels this same spirit in a 1970s and 1980s form. Critic George Szirtes describes Petri as "a remarkable anti-hero poet," stating that "it is not the case of a few revolutionary gestures masquerading as poetry," says Szirtes, "but the poetry itself, which is of one substance with the politics."¹⁴⁸

An example of such tendencies in Petri's poetry can be found in his piece "Gratitude." Petri expresses in his opening lines the uneasiness of the "idiotic silence of state holidays"¹⁴⁹, as if alluding to a traumatic event in the recent past. He states, "people in collective idleness/are even more repellent/than they are when purpose has harnessed him".¹⁵⁰ Yet the focus of his poem is not on the event that clearly affects his conscience; instead, he engages himself in a memory of a sexual experience¹⁵¹ from this same time period. Perhaps expressing gratitude to the woman in the poem for the distraction she provides from Petri's unease, he states,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ György Petri, "Gratitude," in Kenneth McRobbie, "Towards Renewal of a Democratic Poetics: Four Younger Hungarian Poets" *CrossCurrents*. 5 (1986) 412.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Critic Elaine Feinstein writes, Petri "always read politics through sex and death". See: Elaine Feinstein, *Eternal Monday: New and Selected Poems by György Petri*, trans. George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer (New Castle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1999), 9.

Today I will not
 in my old ungrateful way
 let gratuitous love decay in me.
 In the vacuum of streets
 what helps me to escape
 is the memory of your face and thighs,
 your warmth,
 the fish-death smell of your groin.¹⁵²

While clearly those events outside are threatening and more eminent than his preoccupations with his sexual endeavor, he subordinates this thought and relegates it to a singular statement, “I woke to a cannonade/(a round number of years ago/something happened.)”¹⁵³ Yet instead of recalling that “something” which “occurred,” Petri returns to the detailed description of the woman’s belongings strewn about the room. What helps him to “escape” is the fixation on this moment, providing respite from the obvious reality just outside the window. While Petri makes no reference in this poem to 1956 or to political figures as he does in his other works such as “The Under-Secretary Makes a Statement” or “On the 24th Anniversary of the Little October Revolution”, he provides ample room to discern the human impact of such an event from his description.¹⁵⁴ In doing so, he still acknowledges the event and its resonance; he simply chooses to show through his own personal momentary experience the severity of its consequences for his own well-being and his human need to turn to the banal in order to overcome it. This is in some ways more effective than the literal statements on party members or dates, as it condemns the event through the perspective of a personal experience rather than formulating the same statement through more removed and ironic word play.

¹⁵² “Gratitude,” 412.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ McRobbie notes that Petri’s ostensible emphasis on “the individual” is actually aspeaking to a much wider audience than it appears. See: “Four Younger Hungarian Poets,” 399.

Such an example of irony and extreme pessimism that speaks directly to socialist Hungarian society can be found in his “Song”. Petri begins, “This is my home”¹⁵⁵, repeating this statement three times before adding “the Wild East/beautiful/Comecon islands/swimming in light.” The clear socialist reference is then followed by more repetition: “And the air:/it is!/It is just so! Yes, it is!”¹⁵⁶ as if needing to prove its veracity by opposing some nonexistent opposition. The reordering and changing emphasis of words in their repetition also implies a double meaning to “it is just so,” stating not only the existence- “it is”- but describing it- “it is *just* so.” The same occurs in the next stanza, “The air in our country/you can drink it in!/In our land you can/drink the air!”¹⁵⁷ The sardonic quality of Petri’s ode to the Comecon Islands is similar in its commentary to “Gratitude” insofar as it places him in opposition to the state and its doings. Yet while “Song” retains a sense of mischief and mockery, “Gratitude” expresses only pain and resignation. Both, however, achieve the end of indirectly holding politics responsible for his state of mind and that of society.

This discussion of the Petőfi influence and function is not complete without inclusion of Gyula Illyes, whose poetic voice has remained a constant presence in Hungary throughout its socialist history. As literary critic Lóránt Czigány states, “In a sense, Illyés is an embodiment of the 19th-century ‘national poet’, of which Petőfi, the idol of his youth, was the most prominent example.”¹⁵⁸ This champion of “populist” values served on several occasions as the Hungarian national poetic voice, whose authority regained after the fallout of the 1956 revolution allowed him to speak for those who did not have the power or permission to do so. Illyes occupied himself with the Petőfi tradition, returning to Hungary after fleeing

¹⁵⁵György Petri, “Song,” in *Leopold V, An Island of Sound: Hungarian Poetry and Fiction Before and Beyond the Iron Curtain*, ed. George Szirtes (London: Harvill, 2004), 283.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Lóránt Czigány, *A History of Hungarian Literature: from the Earliest Times to the mid-1970s* Digital Library of Hungarian Studies (1984) <http://mek.niif.hu/02000/02042/html/index.html> (accessed: May 23, 2009)

as a soldier in the Red Army to Paris after WWI and serving as editor of the *Nyugat*.¹⁵⁹ In the 1930s, however, he became the face of the Hungarian Populist tradition, whose belief in the Hungarian people's need to "talk through writers and poets"¹⁶⁰ gave him much the same mandate as his poetic hero, for whom he also penned a biography.¹⁶¹

Illyes's poem "After All" expresses, similarly to that of Petri, an individualistic view of the universal. He asks, "What have I become?/The island Iceland in a blind fog/Gliding in the far north."¹⁶² His isolation, he claims, is a form of protection, but to "protect from what?/What boils in me darkly..."¹⁶³ Illyes seems to ask this after accepting his fate and choosing to remove himself from the intrusions of life, but expresses doubt in both its logic and its effectiveness. This can, perhaps, be a reflection of his own life, his years of removal from society under the dictates of socialism, and the disillusionments of withdrawal from public life. That which boils in him, he realizes, is "melting my thick cover."¹⁶⁴ That which he attempts to suppress or disguise from its expression will ultimately express itself despite his intention, "by a foaming, vapor-tressed head/ragingly crying: the geyser"¹⁶⁵. Despite any attempts to not fulfill the needs of his self-expression, it will take its own form and perform this act for him.

Another example of Illyes's introspection with parallels to society is "Before the Journey", the main subject of which is "old men,"¹⁶⁶ also can be interpreted as more than a

¹⁵⁹ Emery Edward George, ed., *Contemporary East European poetry: an Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 239.

¹⁶⁰ Introduction, William Jay Smith, ed., *What You Have Almost Forgotten: Selected Poems by Gyula Illyes*, ed. William Jay Smith (Budapest: Kortárs Kiadó, 1999), 9.

¹⁶¹ Emery, *Contemporary East European Poetry*, 239.

¹⁶² Gyula Illyes, "After All," in *Contemporary East European poetry: an Anthology*, ed. Emery Edward George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 243.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Gyula Illyes, "Before the Journey," in *What You Have Almost Forgotten: Selected Poems by Gyula Illyes*, ed. William Jay Smith (Budapest: Kortárs Kiadó, 1999), 127.

reference to individuals. This “journey” that they must face is presented perhaps as death, though it could be any major transformation, while its “poor body/Which in its weakness longs simply to be cradled/ recalls how good to be once was”¹⁶⁷. He portrays them, while weak, as “paratroopers on a plane/About to jump”¹⁶⁸, as if ready to accept these changes or this next stage “for an existence beyond this”. And yet just like such paratroopers, they harbor the legitimate “Worry (though not permitted to) whether the wings on/Their back/Will open- and, if so, to what end”¹⁶⁹. Therefore with the simple trust that to submit to the reality of change, these old men are acting in their own best interests, they accept this journey, though not without the great apprehension of what lies beyond it. It is clear that Illyes associates these questions and this necessary bravery with the forfeiting of the familiarity of the present and the departure into the unknown; while it applied, no doubt, to his own life as he increased in years, these images of descending into a space with the faith that this descent is worthwhile shows a lack of choice in confronting the inevitable. Wondering secretly if this kind of death to allow for transition is truly for the better is a question that could occupy the minds of not only individuals coming to terms with their age, but for entire societies coming to terms with the death of its own age. In this ambiguous way, Illyes combines the human concerns of an individual with the societal concerns of an entire people, related, no doubt, once again to his own experiences in life.

Despite the general dearth of the 19th century’s presence in novels and poetry, it has been shown that some of its essential characteristics remained relevant for 1970s and 1980s poets in adapting them to their own modernized style of writing. There is one instance, however, where the 19th century provides a backdrop itself, though located in Vilnius rather

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

than Budapest. This is the play *The Impostor* (1982) by György Spiró, based on his novel *The X's* from 1981.¹⁷⁰ The plot is derived from the story of a Polish actor and theatre owner; however, “Based on factors and surviving documents, the play...is not about early 19th-century Poland but about the pervasive misery of eastern European artists struggling for freedom of expression under oppressive regimes among doctrinaire bureaucrats and in the maze of hard-line ideology,” describes editor Clara Györgey.¹⁷¹ An impoverished Polish theatre in Vilnius after the partition of Poland receives a visit from the Polish actor Boguslawski arriving from Warsaw, whose presence was secured in order to show the governor and the Russian Tsar that the Polish population has no intentions of undermining Russian sovereignty. Subject to heavy censorship and the banning of most of its creative works, the company is presented with the opportunity to stage Boguslawski’s translation of “Tartuffe,” starring its translator. The complexity of the political dangers of performing a theatre piece and the loaded statements behind every line in the play become clear as the cast runs through its rehearsal; Boguslawski takes it upon himself to point out the duality of nearly every line himself, confirming, as the character Rybak points out, that “everyone has a dual personality.”¹⁷²

Not only does Boguslawski seem to enlighten the entire cast with his observations on human nature, but he himself is able to play both sides of the political coin, so much so that he is able to curiously orchestrate the arrest and deportation of Rybak while saving the entire cast from punishment by the authorities. This play is clearly addressing not only the strategies of survival and the subversion and circumvention of censorship and extreme limitations on

¹⁷⁰ Clara Györgey, ed, trans., *Mirror to the Cage: Three Contemporary Hungarian Plays*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 101.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² György Spiró, “The Impostor,” *Mirror to the Cage: Three Contemporary Hungarian Plays*, ed., trans. Clara Györgey (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 120.

freedom in what used to be an independent Poland. Indeed these circumstances are easily translated to the present day, where those of the artistic community were also confronted with overcoming the blow to their nation's essential dismantling while taking care not to risk attracting the attention of the authorities. The adeptness of Boguslawski's character and the manipulation of the status quo surely speak to the present day. Boguslawski is able to probe into the very consciences of the cast and elicit unprovoked statements such as "This play is not about the machinations of the secret police!"¹⁷³ The interaction between director Kazynski and Boguslawski is tense, and not without reason, as it is clear that Kazynski's own conscience is not clear:

Kazynski: The Maestro's really a master at twisting words. But how do you explain- and please do explain it since it appears that we're too dense and we can't read- all the criminal acts Tartuffe commits later, all he was accused of in the first two acts.

Boguslawski: Excellent question. Kids, do you have any idea?

Rybak: Revenge. A justified revenge because they turned his most sincere emotions against him.

Kazynski: Shut up! Write your own *Tartuffe*, all right? For the time being, we're putting on Molière's version and not yours!¹⁷⁴

It is also telling that these interactions occur between the play's main actor and its director, placing these characters in their roles that only they can fulfill as expert agitator and the orchestrator of his scheme to undermine the Tsarist authorities. While all ends relatively positively at the close of the play, the tone indicates that the entire undertaking was planned and carried out by Boguslawski's devious but somehow redeeming character.

The novel *A Little Hungarian Pornography* by Péter Esterházy provides a novelistic example, though highly alternative in its nature, that takes the 19th century as its object. In Esterházy's anecdotal form, which constructs the entire novel out of ambiguously connected paragraphs separated by equally ambiguous titles, it is not clear that the fragments of his

¹⁷³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 139-40.

“Part II” involve any reference but that to the socialist regime- especially due to the constant presence of names originating from the 1950s, such as “ÁVO” or “Matyás.” For example, his “Once there lived, II”:

Once there lived a man from the ÁVÓ who was as legendary for his stinginess as he was for his undying devotion to the Party... He had a bulging statue of Stalin on the table next to his desk and he’d throw the money that he got there but as he did that a “portion of the money would *inevitably* fall to the side.” Then when he left each day he’d tally up the contents and say “how the *dickens* did all that money end up on this table? Then, as he calmly swept up the solid new forints he’d say, “And why not? Have I not given the king his due?”¹⁷⁵

It is revealed to the reader only at the end of the novel that in fact all of these anecdotes originate from an anthology about customs officials from fin de siècle Hungary, which Esterházy points out is, “a period we like to refer to as the ‘good old times’ or ‘the peace years’”. He describes his method: “It was into these triumphant and quaint stories of life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the author chose to insert the terrifying words of a specific dictatorship (this is how Emperor Francis Joseph became comrade Rákosi) to see how they would act upon each other....”¹⁷⁶ Therefore not only is the story most likely unknown to the reader, but it is undoubtedly misplaced in the reader’s mind and contextualized in the Rákosi period. His reference to the turn of the century as a period of nostalgia for Hungarians is also made a subject of mockery by its unwilling association with the dictatorship that followed it nearly fifty years later. Esterházy also demonstrates, not without some disquietude for the reader in viewing the final product, how close to one another these two seemingly polar opposite periods can appear when a few names and terms are altered. It is this realization Esterházy evokes by exploiting the vulnerability of a single text, taking active part in just a small portion of its composition, and then standing back to allow the literary and historical effect to develop on its own.

¹⁷⁵ Péter Esterházy, *A Little Hungarian Pornography*, trans., Judith Sollosy (London: Quartet Books, 1995), 68.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 213

Conclusion

Through the modern usage of nineteenth century traditions, Hungarian writers connected themselves to a past that, while outside the realm of contemporary Hungary, was certainly not far removed from the national consciousness. By utilizing the traditional role of a nationally-aware poet, both Petri and Illyes provide divergent examples of their sensitivity towards society and their ability to convey those sentiments found in their contemporary environments. Likewise, the use of more ironic methods to illustrate the oppressive nature of artistic censorship, or to simply make a mockery of the situation are palpable in the sophisticated humor of both Spiró and Esterházy. As a collective, these members of the artistic community show through their various means of expression their attunement to society and to the concerns of the broader national community.

If the question of what is to be achieved by investigating this period as thoroughly as it was could be answered by the contemporary demands of Hungarian society, such an answer might be that without much extraneous justification and extrapolation of 19th century history, intellectuals were able in this fashion to anchor the Hungarian nation in its own past and extract those connections and parallels relevant to the present day. Whether this took the form of literal continuity, historical lessons, precursors to 20th century phenomena, or evidence of the disconnects directly attributable to the atrophy of society under socialism was a matter of investigation that informed Hungarian national identity not through speculation or mythologization of its past, but through historiographic inquiry.

Chapter II. Contemporary Hungarian Society and Identity in Fictional and Non-Fictional Writing

As was shown in the previous chapter, the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary contained within the unpredictable sameness under socialism a number of new and evolving currents in intellectual and artistic life, multiplying its discourses into numerous sub-debates and intersecting paths on a number of topics related to the nation's distant yet ever-pervasive past in the 19th century. The works that take center stage in this chapter, to be sure, engage these overarching themes seen in the previous one. Yet the object of analysis here is to show an even larger spectrum of works, all which contributed to a comprehensive image of contemporary society through analyses of its various components. The summation of these intellectual efforts, with their object the full realization of Hungarian society, achieves in turn a cohesion that enables the development of a national identity. This chapter will investigate the details of this broader discourse in 1970s and 1980s Hungary.

To this end, one intellectual theme identified in this chapter envisions Hungary placed in a wider European context as a member of the region of Central Europe. The Hungarian engagement with the Central European geopolitical and historical discourse contributed to the internal debate of identity, achieving one that was relevant but separate from that of Western Europe, while also preventing it from being relegated to a border region of the Soviet Union in "Eastern Europe." At the same time, an emphasis on the Hungarian national experience in the *longue-durée* as distinct from others and the constitution of that distinctness was also a part of this intellectual inquiry. Related to these societal observations are those works occupied with the future orientation of Hungarian society. These works contain reflections on the ways in which Hungarian intellectuals that viewed themselves as the molders of this ever-pluralizing milieu would proceed with recovering, envisioning, and building Hungarian

society, the historically-weakened backbone of Hungarian national identity. To arrive at such considerations, however, one must also take into account the complex and at times traumatic Hungarian past, including the constant presence of the 1956 Revolution, which demanded historical reflection and societal confrontation.

The literary works discussed in this chapter are perhaps the most numerous and divergent in their creative working of contemporary societal preoccupations and textual confrontation with the complex past of 20th century Hungarian history. While the portrayal of such themes was often woven into these narratives and compositions and represented in a symbolic form, they are nevertheless present in the works of the 1970s and 1980s. Literary critic Kenneth McRobbie states that in this stage of Hungarian literature, it is instructive to inquire as to “how artistic strategies may be stimulated by the tensions within the existing political order.”¹⁷⁷ These “strategies” are the concrete evidence of the literature community’s contribution to the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of Hungarian history as well as the preoccupations of the present. The individual elements of national identity became the primary actors of the literature, magnified and examined in individual forms. This section will identify and analyze the confrontation of these questions pertinent to Hungarian society and the specific thematic forms in which they are presented.

Points of Departure in the History-Nation Relationship

It is helpful here to begin with a reference to the discourse on the relationship of nation and history that originated in the decade preceding the works featured here. It has already been discussed that between the immediate post-1956 and 1970s historiographic developments came the “scientific” atmosphere of the 1960s with its stress on the exactitude and utility of the social sciences and the mandate of historiography to alter its handling of

¹⁷⁷ McRobbie, ““Four Younger Hungarian Poets,” 397.

national consciousness.¹⁷⁸ This discourse, handled in a book by the historian Jeno Szucs appropriately titled *Nation and History: Studies* from 1968, still holds relevance for the works produced in the 1970s and 1980s. It is clear that these historical works, especially those aimed at contextualization of Hungary into a greater European narrative or identification of larger developmental processes in the *longue-durée*, are in part still engaging this problem of reconciling the two concepts. Moreover, the contrast between the works separated by often less than a decade shows the paradigm shifts at work in historiography directed at questions of national identity.

In the commentary of Jeno Szucs one sees the explicit connection and criticism of the two themes of national identity and history from a measured academic distance in his 1968 *Nation and History: Studies*. Here, he takes the opportunity to briefly address the historical and societal debates on national consciousness of the decade. The greater object of Szucs's text is to draw on the cultivation of national consciousness from the Middle Ages to the present, but his distaste for the Hungarian contemporary application of history to form a new national identity is the target of his introduction to the concepts of "nation in historical view and the national aspect of Hungary."¹⁷⁹ To this end he discusses the Molnár Debate and its attack on the "bourgeois" nature of nationalistic Marxist history. Szucs does not sympathize with the details of Molnár's critique, but rather uses him as an example¹⁸⁰ of the value in attacking "fossilized" historiographic tendencies while adhering to the scientific approach to history that Szucs himself appeals for. Szucs also finds merit in the debate's side effect of

¹⁷⁸ Berger and Lorenz, *Contested Nation*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Jeno Szucs, *Nation und Geschichte: Studien*. (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1981), 13.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 62

“destroying myths”¹⁸¹ with which he is preoccupied, regardless of the historiographic tradition.

The importance here is not accusations leveled at socialism for committing similar anachronisms to the “thought model” he associates with Romanticism, combining notions from as distant as the thirteenth century with the modern conceptualization of the nation-state(23) to claim that “something latent existed, that in essence if only in a more ‘instinctive’ form, is identical with the modern national consciousness and as such offers analogies an examples immediately comparable with the present.”¹⁸² Nor is the impact of the Szucs argument to be found in the other side of this criticism, that bourgeois history- that which socialist history was intended to disregard but from whose methods it in fact borrowed- with its “end goal [as] the nation of the 19th and 20th century”¹⁸³ was also destructive to the building of national identity. Rather, his statement as a historian highlights the legitimate question as to what extent socialism has infiltrated the way national identity is formulated through history and how problematic such “peculiarities”¹⁸⁴ in Hungarian historiography are independent of this fact.

It is instructive to keep this critique in mind while observing the works of other authors writing in the 1970s or 1980s, who in their own way are affected by the historical dueling of the 1960s and the subsequent broadening and deepening of historiographic ventures in the following two decades -insofar as they are not locked in a dialectic of “bourgeois” or “Marxist” interpretations of history and their constituent loaded themes and terminology. They are course contributing still from their own respective positions to form not new “peculiarities” but sound historiographic bases of Hungarian national identity.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸² Ibid., 137.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 145.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 16

Spacial and Historical Placement of Hungary in Europe and the Longue-Durée

In the long run the Czechs' irony about themselves could cope with the consequences after the style of Svejek. But maybe the Hungarians are less liable to laugh at themselves because in order to do so they would have had to resolve the contradiction by which the real sufferings of Hungarian society at the hands of this historical framework were accompanied by an unfailing and effective contribution by the Hungarian ruling strata to its maintenance.-Jeno Szucs describing the situation of Hungary in the Habsburg Empire in, "The Three Historical Regions of Europe," 1983¹⁸⁵

As was seen in the previous chapter, there was great emphasis placed on the argument over the functions of feudalism and the transition into early modern and modern state and economic structures. These arguments on Hungarian development redirected themselves to the nature of feudalism in Hungary, the preparatory stages to its modernization. Conceptualizations of development in the *longue-durée* formed a crucial part of Hungarian identity, as such processes reinforced the nation's past and helped to formulate the historical experience(s) that placed Hungary in a context with other nations in the region by association. In the discourse on European identities based on common historical cultural, economic, or social experiences, the recognition of *Central Europe* as distinct from both "Eastern" and "Western" designations was imperative for the conception of Hungary as a nation belonging to this region. It was also within this context that it then developed its own specifically *Hungarian* characteristics.. Two texts by Jeno Szucs and Péter Hanák, respectively, offer some insight into this discourse, both of whom declare in their works their participation in the conversation initiated by István Bibó.

Bibó set out to explain many developments in the history of East-Central Europe, not least of all identifying the peculiar nature of its nationalism so crucial to the catastrophes of the 20th century. Though he constructed a specific typology for this brand of destructive nationalism that he traces to the eighteenth century, the appearance of this "explosive

¹⁸⁵ Jeno Szucs, "The Three Historical Regions of Europe," *Acta Historica Academiae Sciatarium Hungaricase* 29 (2-4) (1983), 170.

nationalism”¹⁸⁶ was only a portion of his greater historical inquiry. Bibó’s aim was, in the words of Szucs, to show that “democracy was not a bourgeois superstructure but the objective technique for exercising freedom,”¹⁸⁷; that is, he was looking to trace the development of this freedom.¹⁸⁸ The attainment and institutionalization of democracy differed, however, according to these regional distinctions, and set the stage for the nature of the later development of nationalism in these regions. It was the “maldevelopment”¹⁸⁹ of this thread of democracy that is largely abandoned in Central and Eastern Europe, who are instead motivated by an existential fear¹⁹⁰, which also separates these regions from their Western counterparts. It was Bibó’s preoccupation to explain and see beyond this phenomenon, that Szucs and Hanák address and build upon in their own works. .

Jeno Szucs takes care in his 1983 essay “The Three Historical Regions of Europe” to delineate specific geographical boundaries in order to locate Central Europe on a physical as well as a mental map. Szucs identifies this ambiguously located territory contiguous with modern Hungary to neither Western nor Eastern Europe,¹⁹¹ identifying an “intermediate” zone between an expanding East and West, the location of a “central” Europe. These divisions he describes that develop between the regions in the sixteenth century, according to Szucs, become deeply entrenched with time. He notes, “It is as if Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt had studied carefully the status quo of the age of Charlemagne on the 1130th anniversary of his death.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ See: István Bibó, “The Distress of the Small Eastern European States,” in *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed., Károly Nagy, trans., András Boros Kazai (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1991).

¹⁸⁷ Szucs, *Three Historical Regions*, 132.

¹⁸⁸ Gábor Kovacs, “Can Power be Humanized?” *Institute for Philosophical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (1998) http://www.phil-inst.hu/intezet/kg01_f.htm (accessed on: April 25, 2009).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 132-35

¹⁹² Ibid, 133

But as was already clear when Bibó sketched his own three regions, this argument is based on more than simply geographical location. Szucs claims to also search for the traces of democracy in this long narrative.¹⁹³ Indeed he does find a democratic heritage of Europe in the web of Western feudalism, and ties Hungary-at least in part in the complicated constellation of Central Europe- into this tradition, as Bibó does in his own work.¹⁹⁴ The cornerstone and precondition of this development is in essence a separation of “state” and “society” and the notion of an early “social contract” in what Szucs defines as Western Europe is its “from below”¹⁹⁵ nature. In this medieval amalgam of autonomous and fragmented societies came three types of “theoretical liberation” from feudal subjugation;¹⁹⁶ Hungary followed most of these patterns, says Szucs, but often in a less entrenched or complete form.¹⁹⁷ While in the fourteenth century Western feudalism’s form of serfdom was virtually dismantled and its structures began to follow a nascent path towards capitalism based on money rent and tenancy,¹⁹⁸ in the East began the age of “second serfdom;” he counts Hungary at this stage as part of this Eastern milieu.

Szucs’ discussion of the rise of the Estates and the nobility in Hungary recalls the discussions on the 19th century, whose development he traces back to the fifteenth century. Not only does Szucs note a sharp deviation from the Western European model of the Estates, he identifies the Hungarian nobility as the foremost problem in its history. He refers bluntly to, “the boorish and uneducated lesser nobility so imbued with an overall awareness of its privileges and so justifiably dubbed Bibó the ‘most noxious phenomenon in the development

¹⁹³ Ibid., 131.

¹⁹⁴ Kovacs, “Can Power be Humanized?”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 140

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 147

¹⁹⁷¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 154

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 157-8

of modern Hungary.”¹⁹⁹ Debunking the “myth” of Mohács in 1526, canonized by so many Hungarian historians as the beginning of the end for the fortunes of the Hungarian Kingdom, Szucs states- in an interesting return to a current theme in historiography- that the historical travesty was not defeat but the strength of the Hungarian nobility, the constant “compromise between absolutism and system of Estates.”²⁰⁰ The upside of Szucs’ argument is that this unfortunate reality of Hungarian history was based much more on the constitution of its nobility than on any outside impositions.²⁰¹ And no movement prior to the 19th century , according to Szucs, should be viewed as movements of independence consisting of a “national society;” here, indeed, Hungary had visible shortcomings.²⁰²

Péter Hanák’s historiographic interjection into the- according to Szucs, misled - discourse on Hungarian “maldevelopment” goes beyond the idea that one false step in the history of the Middle Ages could condemn Hungary to historical purgatory for the following six centuries. He does so in his “Central Europe: A Historical Region in Modern times (A Contribution to the Debate about the Regions of Europe)” by identifying the nascent elements of capitalism in the region that separated it from Eastern Europe. Based on the idea that the development of wage-earning and thus capitalism is much more likely to rise out of a money-rent agrarian economy than under the continuation of socage, Hanák’s findings show that the conditions in Hungary were not as absolute as they are often portrayed.²⁰³ Therefore the prospect of capital development was indeed not impossible due to the nature of the Hungarian feudal past, as Hanák shows evidence of “‘embourgeoisement’ on the one hand,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 155.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 173.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 174.

²⁰² Ibid, 174.

²⁰³ Peter Hanák, “Central Europe: A Historical Region in Modern Times (A Contribution to the Debate about the Regions of Europe)” in *In Search of Central Europe* , eds. György Schöpfli and Nancy Wood (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989) 58.

‘proletarianization’ on the other.”²⁰⁴ Proving this possibility alters the picture entirely, says Hanák, as the very concepts “property and freedom” associated with Western capitalist development are applicable somewhat to Hungary, though they would be impossible to imagine in *Eastern Europe*.

Szucs’ targeting of the Hungarian nobility and a longstanding “compromise” with their own “oppressors” as its real historical setback, rather than on events or a lack of capital, not only has rhetorical ties to the previous chapter but reveals with a *longue-durée* analysis that which is most peculiar- at least, according to Szucs- in Hungarian national history. One receives a constant reminder not to harbor illusions with regard to this relationship, as its reality was not always consistent with its appearance. At the same time, this separates Hungary from its Eastern neighbors all the same, a notion supported by Hanák, who is also careful to acknowledge those few shared phenomena between the two regions. Thus the historical narrative aimed at realistically approaching Hungary as a constituent element of Central Europe yields a result that simultaneously implies an obligatory backwardness and a distinctly “Central” progressiveness that allows for little confusion in the historical region’s discourse on Hungarian national identity.

*From “Alternatives” to “Euronationalism”*²⁰⁵

Related to the placement of Hungary in a Central European regional context and the identification of Hungary’s unique historical development was the role of intellectuals in molding and upholding Hungarian national identity. Such considerations were of an anticipatory nature, oriented towards and contingent on future changes and shifts in power and further development of the society in which intellectuals operated. The works

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁰⁵ György Konrád, “Is the Dream of Central Europe Still Alive?” in *Cross Currents*. 5 (1986), 112.

discussed in this section, *East European Alternatives*, *Antipolitics*, and *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, which indicate by their titles the mobility and progression of their subject matter, isolate the functional contribution of the intellectual and his/her evolving societal role and address what steps to take next with the knowledge at their disposal. All three identify and evaluate the manifold perspectives on the transforming role of intellectuals in society and the societal visions and strategies they espouse, which ultimately translates to an evaluation of the intellectual's capacity to facilitate an identity in harmony with their own societal designs.

The three authors Iván Szelényi, Elemér Hankiss and György Konrád share a point of convergence in that they all turn to an evaluation of the contributions of intellectuals for the purpose of emancipating them from the vicious cycle of politics. The supranational perspective inherent in all three works consequently connects the Hungarian intellectual community to the broader Central European one and calls attention to long-term processes at work that are largely out of their control. Konrád's approach in his *Antipolitics* in a way becomes a discussion of national identity through its circumvention, or, rather, by approaching it through the larger themes in which national identity exists. Of course Konrád's aim differs greatly from Hankiss', whose mandate is to view society from a sociological standpoint and place the circulation of ideas against the backdrop of the Hungarian societal transformation he traces from the totalitarianism of the 1950s to the resurgence of society in the late 1980s. Meanwhile the focus of the joint work of Szelényi and Konrád embeds itself in a quasi-Marxist framework of class with its own epistemological implications. Yet all three achieve these ends using the same medium and in so doing attach to the national identity discourse their respective conclusions on the increasingly eminent

societal function of intellectuals and the hypothetical scenarios in which they lend their input.

Konrád's *Antipolitics* invests in the intellectuals the power to counter the destructive nature of politics, but moreover asserts that developments of the past century make it impossible to revert to a national alternative. Rather, according to Konrád, only an international network of this strata in society is able to redeem Eastern and Central Europe from its historical quandaries. To carry out these *Antipolitics* Konrád seeks to unify efforts with those engaged in a similar struggle. Author Richard Esbenshade has observed in Konrád's fiction what he terms a "Konrád paradigm" for revitalizing the national memory, where "the intellectual takes over role of savior in his or her mind of the nation in times of struggle;" it a similar obligation and representative quality that he seems to also bestow upon his theoretical intellectuals for anti-political purposes.²⁰⁶ Konrád is adamant in his backing of intellectuals, and just as emphatic in his claim that the nation would not solve the problem of political oppression: "There is no national highroad of history, alongside which the paths other nations have followed are only side roads...There are no standard models, no exemplary systems."²⁰⁷

Thus in his own way Konrád is portraying a *Sonderweg* of Central Europe, though he is averse to the sub-division of this vision into extolling the unique qualities of each individual nation within it. He is set on developing a plan for a region that by geopolitical misfortune cannot have one, orchestrated and executed by its collective intelligentsia. Yet Konrád's writing contains also a brief reference to the Hungarian situation; his most telling

²⁰⁶ Esbenshade, "Remembering to Forget," 77-78.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 169.

remark is “Hungarian society is beginning to resemble us.”²⁰⁸ This seems to be the characteristic he is most concerned with preserving, as he does not advocate for the dissolution of nations per se but rather a superseding of national loyalty to an expression of “Euronationalism.” He views as positive the fact that national feeling has improved in Hungary: “There is no sharp break between culture and reality, only some displacement. We are not exactly winners, but the stereotype of a nation in decline- the threadbare product of a mournful romanticism- doesn’t fit us either.”²⁰⁹ He observes this development of what seems to be a more rational national self-reflection in Hungary no doubt with the optimistic caveat that perhaps these national intellectuals will enlist themselves as well under the Central and Eastern European banner of antipolitics.

Very much connected to these ideas of intellectual power and the unique path of Central Europe is the lengthy sociological study by Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. While the study takes on an entire history of the intellectual in a Western and Eastern comparative perspective, it is this particular fusing of the two concepts, that is, of intellectual power as the particularity of (what is referred to here as) Eastern Europe, that takes the underlying argument of *Antipolitics* one step further. Indeed this study revolves around the essential difference between the experience of intellectuals under capitalism and socialism, where only in the former do they achieve a class, rather than a “stratum,” status- something that by its nature the capitalist West cannot produce.²¹⁰

While a detailed description of their findings is not appropriate here, it is useful to review the essence of Konrád and Szelényi’s argument to the extent that it not only proves

²⁰⁸ György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay*, trans. Richard E. Allen (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 167.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 167

²¹⁰ Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals*, 64.

the exceptionality of the socialist case, but places this exceptionality in the hands of an intelligentsia. Their starting point is based on the idea that intellectuals “create and preserve knowledge” and with its possession of this knowledge “act as spokesmen for different social groups and articulate particular social interests.”²¹¹ Their placement in society, say Konrád and Szelényi, is achieved in part by fulfilling this representative function, through their creation of a *ruling* class and “dominance” over that of the working class.²¹² In the rational redistribution system of a socialist economy, the planning role of the intelligentsia- tasked with carrying it out- is reinforced by the ideology of the system.”²¹³ But in due time, some in possession of this knowledge begin to question the system from within, which Konrád and Szelényi claim this is the “major conflict in Soviet society.”²¹⁴

In the period of “compromise” they refer to, however, placing its beginnings in the 1960s, it is only the “marginal intelligentsia” who can “realize the class character of the intelligentsia” and lead it away from “the ethos of redistribution.”²¹⁵ Konrád and Szelényi confirm here that the mechanism of criticism afforded this marginal intelligentsia is a powerful tool in the ruling elites’ own undoing. The argument is built there is also a clear attempt to process the history which Konrád and Szelényi have both experienced as intellectuals- and more importantly- as individuals under a socialist system- themselves. Though there is no explicit reference to Hungary as a case here, one can see the narrative unfolding as it reaches the socialist period, describing with little abstractness the conditions under which they as Hungarian intellectuals also lived. Its significance is that in this retelling of the intellectuals’ experience, they are retelling the history which they know and assigning

²¹¹ Ibid., 3.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 21.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 251

it their own “scientific” significance. In light of the weight they place on the “*marginal* [emphasis added] intellectual”²¹⁶ for recognizing its own class and emancipating itself from traditional attempts at power, Konrád and Szelényi suggest a crucial relevance for those intellectuals standing on the cusp of the system for Central European- and Hungarian – society.

It is, in fact, this very image of the marginal intellectual that is conjured by Elemér Hankiss’ *East European Alternatives*; his argument begins with the premise that it is the placement of intellectuals “outside the system,”²¹⁷ that endows them with a particular kind of freedom not at the disposal of Western intellectuals. It is this “freedom,” which he at length defines in its many meanings, that enables Eastern European intellectuals to innovate such *alternatives* that would not be realized in a Western context. In this way Hankiss too appeals to the idea of the unique qualities of the Eastern European experience, though his study leads him down a slightly different path.

In line with the statement that his book is in essence “about freedom and servitude,”²¹⁸ Hankiss reviews the available expressed alternatives and their feasibility at the critical juncture of the late 1980s, when he was writing his book. His central question is “Is the country running in a forced, and destructive, orbit? Or has it arrived at an important crossroad in its history where it can make important decisions and can play a significant role in determining its future course?”²¹⁹ Here he lets the discourse speak for itself by presenting the varying perspectives. This addresses, however, more than a question of the alternatives set forth in the 1980s; Hankiss also reflects exhaustively on the previous four decades by

²¹⁶ Ibid., 234

²¹⁷ Hankiss, *Alternatives*, 7.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 266.

presenting a series of “meta-scenarios,” or long-term significance to be extracted from these events produced by intellectuals around him.

This anticipatory synthesis of intellectual meditation based on empirical evidence includes also some of the same opinions expressed above and in the previous chapter of this thesis, such as “continuity,” meaning that in Hungary “the gentry spirit may have survived the cataclysmic changes of the 1940s and 1950 and have re-emerged in socialist form;”²²⁰ and the idea of “backwardness,” that Eastern European countries “have to work off centuries” of it.²²¹ Interestingly it also addresses those same themes seen in earlier historiography of “breakdowns of modernization”²²² as the root of socialist evil and the continuous struggle against it. To this end, such familiar terms as *embourgeoisement*, *proletarianization*, or *dominance of a coalition of elite groups*²²³ fit themselves into the discourse. It is proven in Hankiss’ work that such preoccupations with themes such as bourgeois culture, the underdevelopment of modernity, or the staying power of a noble mentality were part of the question of their direct connection to the fermentation and unfolding of socialism as it did in Hungary- not simply historical curiosities about a forgotten previous century. He captures this sentiment in his statement that “the potentials for a fresh start- capital, human resources, and even the nuclei of economic and social self-organization- were already there, deadlocked and concealed within the structures of state socialist society, in the 1970s and early 1980s...”²²⁴

Yet Hankiss, like Konrád and Szelényi, exercises his own kind of sociological retrospection by tracing the inner mechanisms of Hungary’s totalitarian experience of the

²²⁰ Ibid., 131.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 133.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 135.

1950s and the post-1956 society that emerged from it. It is not only systematic but thorough in its approach; it seeks through this analysis to deconstruct the web of oppression under the Rákosi regime in order to observe and understand not only the facts of what occurred but the social damages and transformations that came of it, or as he terms it, the characteristics of the “paralyzed society” prior to the Kádár period of “liberalization.” Likewise his analysis of Kádárism attempts to trace the rise of the “second society” as a post-totalitarian development able to coexist with that which he defines as anything ‘realized of the ideology-sanctioned model,’ the “first society.”²²⁵ Thus Hankiss takes socialism in its totality and subjects it to his scientific analysis of its societal impact; only then does he pose the question of what to do next.

Confronting the Socialist Past and Present: Reality and Utopia of Hungarian Marxists in the 20th Century

There is no want of literature in keeping with the broad theme of contemporary Hungarian society in the 1970s and 1980s that includes at least some semblance of criticism towards the socialist regime. This particular collection of writers, however, has the added element, that all are scholars approaching their criticism from within their Marxist frameworks. It is, after all, to be expected that among these philosophers and historians there was a tendency to reach back into the accumulated Marxist stock even in this period of “liberalization.” For this reason such literature has the additional characteristic of originating, so to speak, from the *other side* of the debate, one which had expanded to a reflection, now in this uneasily quiet period, of the cataclysmic effects of socialism prior to the post-1956 world of the present day. For those who subscribed to the tenets of Marxism and who were loyal to the – at least in theory- *raison d’être* of Hungarian socialism also experienced the need in this period to deal in their own way with the past.

²²⁵ Ibid.,86.

Cautiously removing themselves from the socialist associations with the 1950s, these authors- all of the Lukács-led Budapest school- set about exercising their philosophy to make a sensible judgment of the past experience while producing an alternative argument on the nature of the dictatorial socialism that took place in Hungary and its effects on society. These prolific names: Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, Mihály Vajda and György Márkus, regarded democracy as a reality without which socialism cannot exist, though this version of reality still revolves around a Marxist reasoning. Their findings, however, are instructive here, as they are not only an ambiguous, or at least precarious, presence in this debate as champions of Marxist philosophy, but also as an indicator of the pervasiveness of the transformative nature of this period. This voice from the Left, associated as it was by ideological persuasion with the evils of the past and tensely situated as critical observers of the indefinable socialism under Kádár, embodies the progression of the identity debate, when now even they too are party to a philosophical focus on society.

Fehér and Heller's *Dictatorship over Needs* offers an anthropological view of socialist society²²⁶, which contains "unreserved criticism of our own earlier self-deceptions."²²⁷ Indeed this vision of society is presented with the purpose of proving that what constitutes these societies is not socialism at all as they understand it.²²⁸ To highlight the differences between their concept of socialism and reality, and to show in exactly what ways the regime cannot "deliver" is the subject of the so-called *dictatorship over needs*. Here the definition Vajda provides in his own "Is Kádárism an Alternative?" is informative: since the economy is dominated by a central planning authority, the "planability" of human needs being impossible to achieve unless it "dictates consumption through totalitarian decisions," it essentially plans

²²⁶ Zagorka Golubović, "Why Dictatorship over Needs is not Socialism?" *Praxis International* 3 (1984), 322.

²²⁷ Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), vii-viii.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

both.²²⁹ Pushed along by the “paternalism” of the state and an overblown role of the party, human needs are subordinated to the “universal needs” dictated by the state.²³⁰

The similarities to discussions of the nature of totalitarian regimes is not coincidental here; Heller herself contributed to this discourse by composing a hypothetical introduction of Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism in Eastern Left, Western Left*.²³¹ The crux of the argument is that totalitarianism, though not realized in its ideal form, continues insidiously existing in Hungarian society, despite the appearance of liberalization and limited freedoms on its surface.²³² While her claims are centered on the Soviet Union proper where state and society alike are “totalized,”²³³ many of the same totalitarian characteristics of the state exist in the satellite countries such as Hungary. Borrowing from Arendt, Heller states that the term “totalitarian” describes an entire *culture*, not simply a political system.²³⁴ While fortunately Hungary is an example of totalization of ideology and politics, but not of society, the system is subject to traditional, internal causes of collapse- but the stability of the dictatorship in Hungarian society makes it so that “all hopes of a near collapse are misguided.”²³⁵ Thus Heller forms a continuum between the terror of the past and the subdued nature of the present, rather than isolating and examining totalitarian Rákosi period independently. This approach places the onus still on this system rather than socialism itself, as if to somehow indirectly emancipate the “real” socialism from any of the pitfalls of drawing parallels

²²⁹ Ibid, 135

²³⁰ Douglas M. Brown, *Towards a Radical Democracy : The Political Economy of the Budapest School* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 117.

²³¹ Ágnes Heller, “An Imaginary Preface to the 1984 Edition of Hanna Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,” in *Eastern Left, Western Left : Totalitarianism, Freedom and Democracy*, eds. Ferenc Fehér and Ágnes Heller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) .

²³² Ibid., 250.

²³³ Ibid., 251.

²³⁴ Ibid., 244.

²³⁵ Ibid., 250.

between these historical periods and therefore holding socialism responsible for either one of them.

Vajda adds to the same conversation by summing up “existing socialism”²³⁶ in the contention that existing socialism is nothing less than a “social phenomenon”²³⁷ that characterizes not only a system but an entire society. Vajda, however, feels himself “revolutionary” in the present situation,²³⁸ whose attack on the “reductionism” of Marxism also notes an ideological disjuncture from others in its view of society.²³⁹ Like Fehér, Heller and Márkus, he points out the negative consequences of the nonexistent state-society divide,²⁴⁰ but claims that this is an inherent consequence of Marxism itself, not a malformation of an ideal type of socialism- at least in Central Europe.²⁴¹ The reduction of interest to individual needs is the flaw in this interpretation of Marxism, he claims; moreover it is this which “reduces communities to mere interest groups,” thus destroying the fabric of the civil society he regards as so crucial to a democratic society. “Common needs lead to common interest in asserting them,” he states.²⁴² “Yes, interest is precisely the declaration of a claim to assert a need.”²⁴³

While all authors generally agree²⁴⁴ on its destructive social impact, Fehér and Heller place even more emphasis on its adamant claim that this development is a separate one from any capitalist development, unique among socialist countries of the Soviet bloc who are bound together in their negative historical experience. Vajda, on the other hand, ties this to

²³⁶Mihály Vajda, Introduction, in *The State and Socialism : Political Essays*, ed. Mihály Vajda (London: Allison and Busby, 1981), 1.

²³⁷ Ibid, 134.

²³⁸ Vajda, *The State and Socialism*, 2.

²³⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

²⁴¹ Mihály Vajda, “The Crisis of the System in Eastern Europe and the Attitude of Hungarian Intellectuals,” in *The State and Socialism*, 125.

²⁴² Vajda, *The State and Socialism*, 12.

²⁴³ Ibid., 13

²⁴⁴ Vajda, “The Crisis of the System,” 134.

occupation rather than regional unity: the crisis precipitated by socialism is due to “their present system imposed upon them,” that is, there is no “organic unity.”²⁴⁵ Nothing but the looming presence of the Soviet Union acts as a cohesive factor among these socialist countries, a lesson he says was learned in Prague Spring- that the Soviet Union will not allow the rise of political democracy in any country of this region.²⁴⁶ While this brings Vajda to the conclusion that the only progress to be made is seen in strictly economic “compromises” such as that under Kádár and the quietly developing “public sphere” seen in Hungary,²⁴⁷ and in their own discussion of totalitarian regimes that the possibility of change is a futile one, Fehér and Heller still persist in typologizing socialism in a way that could be potentially realized.

The work of these Marxist philosophers is noteworthy for the emphasis placed on the crucial separation of society and state as well as the importance of an existing society for the maintenance of individual needs. It reflects a similar theme to the other not exclusively Marxist commentaries on the role of society in the national identity discourse. At the same time, it is obviously filtered through the Marxist perspective, which has the added agenda of maintaining the relevance of socialism to some degree and processing the past in a way that does not demonize the ideology behind their own philosophies. This too, however, forms a portion of the national identity in its conceptualization of the contemporary reality that is undeniably related to the pervasiveness of the socialist system.

Literature: The Personalization of Society

A common theme occupying the minds of those participating in this discourse on national identity was the importance of identifying those carriers of the societal fabric even

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 123

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 130

²⁴⁷ Mihály Vajda, “Is Kadarism an Alternative?” in *The State and Socialism*, 141.

throughout the most socially atomizing periods. Looking back on this experience, the question then becomes even more urgent as to how and by whom the past is interpreted with both its relevancy for the present and its confrontation in society- as has been present to some degree in many of these works thus far. Turning now to literature, is it interesting to observe the manifold ways in which this theme permeates writings from this period.

The recollection spoken of here, this retrieval and reworking of the past, is part of the overall function of *memory*. Once again the insights of Richard Esbenshade on the tumultuous relationship of memory and nation in Eastern and Central Europe elucidate a common theme found in the literature of this period. Defending the collective memory against memory manipulation, it is the intelligentsia, to return to the earlier stated Konrád paradigm, that is responsible for the nation in this regard.²⁴⁸ Endowed with this messenger function, they must negotiate which memory is being preserved or protected- the private or the public, the official or the marginal, the individual or the collective, and so on. It is this function of writers in reality that is visible in these writings, as well as the question they pose to society as to the constitution of this memory, the nature of its remembrance, or if it is retrievable at all, that also expresses itself in these works.

Memory/Memory of Death/Death of Memory

Because the cemetery talks of nothing but the insane passion for survival. It tells us that we have nothing to do with death, only this carnival, this travesty, this idiotic museum of anxious contortions, this beastly hunger. This sophomoric wit, this choreography of vanities.- György Konrád, The City Builder²⁴⁹

Thus the theme of memory, and as a sub-theme those memories subjected to death or repression, are threads running through the various narratives. These themes are represented in a number of ways in the characters of these short stories and novels, conveying always

²⁴⁸ Esbenshade, "Remembering to Forget," 77.

²⁴⁹ György Konrád, *The City Builder*, trans. Ivan Sanders (London: Penguin, 1987), 137.

some sense of disorientation and disconnection from the original event, sometimes resolved through rediscovery or revelation, and other times relegated to the darker recesses of the mind for want of a better means of coping with their consequences.

Géza Ottlik's short story "Nothing's Lost" speaks to exactly the question of *who* will carry on the memory of a whole nation, and develops through his narrative a commentary reflected in his title on the intricate continuities of society despite the passage of time or the destructiveness of events. Ottlik experiments with the mechanism of memory and continuity in his story of successful Hungarian violinist Jacobi, who after a thirty year absence returns to Budapest to accept an award from the city. As he steps off the plane and enters Hungary, there is little familiarity in his surroundings- he is "besieged" by his native language.²⁵⁰ He is seemingly unable to recall more than the single memories of events and locations, the very medium with which he thinks has been altered with time.

Here Ottlik's insight on memory through association reveals itself, as Ottlik presents Jacobi's fragmented memories, one by one reproduced in the present through a series of associations. It is not specifically Hungarian or even his forgetting that is the cause of his disquietude, but rather in the chain of thoughts initiated by the sounds he hears. It is in this way that Jacobi's past life is revealed to him. For instance, upon hearing the word "window," he first repeats the word in several languages in his own head, which leads him to a moment in his childhood in Budapest. In this memory, he sees the word "guarantee" for the first time in the window of a dyer's store, and attempts to deduce the word's meaning by considering related objects and ideas. He comes eventually to find out its real meaning, "But as the different meanings of the word multiplied the nuances settled layer upon layer on the first

²⁵⁰ Géza Ottlik, "Nothing's Lost," in *An Island of Sound*, ed. George Szirtes and Miklós Vajda (London: Harvill, 2004), 166.

meaning he had known, and were all in some way connected with H. Millne and Sons.”²⁵¹ These nuances appear to be the raw material of his memory, never removing but simply adding to previous observations.

Ottlik then introduces the idea of essence, the core of continuity, as Jacobi recovers these elements of his life: for example, only from squatting down “to a child’s level” outside of his old friend Otto’s building and hearing “its essence” which was “in C minor” could he locate it again.²⁵² As this and multiple other melodies return to him, “The noises of the street grew more distinct and scattered... ‘My God,’ thought Jacobi, ‘I have known this land.’”²⁵³ Recognizing this essence, stating that he has known the land, expresses Jacobi’s role as slowly upturning not only his own memory, but that of the collective. As even characters who are presumed dead return to interact with Jacobi, it is clear that this is not a literal meeting or one between whole forms- at times he communicates only with this essence, as these same events and characters begin to appear in new forms, recognizable to Jacobi through his identification of their original qualities, such as their sounds or appearances. Hence Jacobi fashions himself “a spy of the angels in a world of humans,”²⁵⁴ for which he collects these memories. Jacobi’s memory functions here like the memory of Budapest personified, cataloging events in a mind that encompasses not just that of an individual but of an entire time. By blurring the lines of reality and imagination, Ottlik seems to imply that what is once is never completely relinquished, but instead finds its continuity throughout time by incorporating itself into another whole.

The remembrance of death, portrayed as a personal recollection of a traumatic event often in the form of a memoir, touches on the nature of personal memory as a representation

²⁵¹ Ibid, 168.

²⁵² Ibid, 177.

²⁵³ Ibid, 183.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 173.

of the collective memory of a nation, the two united in this case by death. This unity is applicable to recollections of 1956, where memory of death is here tantamount to fulfilling what Esbenshade calls the “Kundera paradigm,”²⁵⁵ that is, “memory as struggle,” as a way of confronting that which is societally repressed and that which is redeemed in a personal, against an official, memory. This theme is observable in Péter Nádas’ novel *A Book of Memories*. The remembering and forgetting of Nádas’ characters in his four parallel stories reflect a constant sense of anxiety towards the future, made obvious by the environment of the totalitarian regime where the story takes place, but also by its constant relationship to his haunting past. This past and the memories connected with it revolve around death, especially as Nádas’ protagonist recalls the individual death of his friend Kálmán and others around him in the October 23 uprising. In this passage, he questions the recollection of death altogether, doubting its ability to unify himself with those who have shared this experience:

We weren’t looking at each other but in each other’s eyes we were staring at that mutually understood, impersonal, volatile, and for some reason profoundly shameful yes, which could only allude to death and to the countless dead, perhaps in each other’s eyes we were looking at the shame of the survivors, the facts that needed no explanation yet were inexplicably irrevocable, looking in each others’ eyes as if we needed to gain time, despite our fretful haste, enough time for the glint of disgrace to fade from our open eyes, but fade into what, where to? Into talk, clarification, recollections and explanations? But what was there to recollect or explain if in the moment of saying goodbye we couldn’t have a common future and there was nothing to be salvaged from our common past?²⁵⁶

In stating that “nothing to be salvaged from our common past,” Nádas implies a futility in memories that can exist only as a reminder of suffering because they are not permitted by circumstances to fulfill any other explanatory or conciliatory role. He later

²⁵⁵ Esbenshade, “Remembering to Forget,” 77.

²⁵⁶ Peter Nádas, *A Book of Memories*, trans. Imre Goldstein and Ivan Sanders (London: J Cape, 1997), 481.

relates that reciting the story of the October uprising to his lover Melchior felt much “like desecrating the dead.”²⁵⁷

Yet proclaiming its futility is only one sentiment expressed towards the memory of death, and even this is not maintained within the novel; later in the story he involuntarily relays these events to Melchior, though he himself does not know why. It is not only the recollection of the October uprising, but of the entire totalitarian experience of these characters under the Rákosi regime that seems to infiltrate the story not by deliberate or active recollection but through the remaining traumas in their present. He muses that perhaps this was his motivation in explaining his past to his lover Melchior, whose inability or unwillingness to comprehend the gravity of his story and the meaning behind his retelling it: “slightly offended, I reminded him of the aspects of Hungarian history, offended because of course nobody likes his entire existence to be seen as the symptom of a disease.”²⁵⁸ It is here that he comes to realize that these outpourings, seemingly related to his emotional experiences with his lover in Berlin, are also chronic manifestations of his own unconscious attempts to come to terms with his own past- which in turn reasserts his authority over the past of his own nation.

Konrad, in his capacity as fiction author, approaches the memory of death and the death of memory through his protagonist in *The City Builder*, but returns to the theme of the carrier of the collective memory, embodied by the intellectual figure of the city builder. The description of his father’s passing, in comparison to the monotony he expresses regarding other experiences with death, contains tones of disbelief and the inability to accept its reality. This is perhaps related to the fact that as a city planner as well, he views and portrays his

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 501.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 412.

father in the narrative as more an institution than as an individual, a bastion of the “Plan” he holds so sacred, a symbol of the previous generation of architects. The absolute incomprehensibility and subsequent emotional reaction to his father’s nonexistence stems from a fear of disconnection, of a break in the chain of knowledge. His anxiety towards the unknown is that which his father can no longer relay to him:

Because I do not believe that what I see is only a coat left behind....because I cannot follow his retreat with my aggressive, inquisitive intellect- though I watched many people die, I cannot leave without a shudder of ignorance this temple of derision, my father’s house, the rotting philosopher’s stone, the frontier marker of the end of the world...And what will become of my father, my accidental and brotherly prototype...If I could learn something about that other side, about father’s domain, everything would change here, too, but because he can’t whisper into my ear the one word that would put me at ease...²⁵⁹

Now without the voice behind the “rotting philosopher’s stone,” or “his accidental and brotherly prototype,” he experiences angst not only towards no longer having this intellectual counterpart, whom he clearly views as more than a father, but towards the insecurity of his *own* future as a member of the intelligentsia. Because he perceives the role of city planners as deistic figures above the mechanisms of society, endowed with the “teleological” meaning Konrád and Szelényi refer to in their text, the fear for his future as a human being in this moment of emotional weakness fuses with his fear for his own societal function.²⁶⁰ Told in this way, the exhausted and resigned tone of Konrád’s character also conveys the difficulty of remembrance and the cost to the present state of mind that the conscience can exact- which can be applied, of course, to the individual or to an entire community.

Touches of Romanticism and the Game of Language

This section addresses the treatment of the 19th century concepts of nurturing and preserving the nation against annihilation, primarily through the use of language. This central

²⁵⁹ Konrád, *The City Builder*, 130

²⁶⁰ Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals*, 12-13.

preoccupation of the Romantics in the early and mid-19th century of language as the foremost component of a nation is an influence already touched upon in earlier discussions on the “utopia” of 19th century nobility as well as the composition of Central and Eastern European contemporary nationalism. Here it is subject to literary treatment in an ironic manner, illuminating the language viewed as the bastion of culture and preserver of national unity and inserting this perspective into the modern discourse on the components of Hungarian national identity. At the same time, it consistently addresses by its nature as a means of expression the question of continuity and articulation of a society even under duress- through territorial loss, conflict with other nations, or even self-censorship- a theme well-known to the writers of the Kádár era.

Here it may be useful to recall the minor but oft-cited motivational factor in the movement for national autonomy and the fulfillment of liberal ideals, that is, a constant fear of annihilation of the nation, a kind of descent into insignificance, due to neglect of the nation and its driving force- language. This was precipitated by the words of German philosopher J. G. Herder on the fate of the Hungarian nation, perceived as a kind of apocalyptic prophecy.²⁶¹ Herder’s study of language and its symbiotic relationship with the nation it represents glorified it as “the vehicle of human thoughts”²⁶² and raised the stakes of language development and preservation to dauntingly new levels.

If, as Herder purported, “each nation speaks in accordance with its thought and thinks in accordance with its speech” and “ideas are imbued into speakers of that language, which

²⁶¹ This is in reference to Herder’s comment that Hungary as a nation would eventually die out. See: Gerő, András, “Industrial Development in the Eyes of Opposition Reformers in the 1840s,” in *Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience*, ed. András Gerő (Budapest: CEU Press, 1993), 22

²⁶² Herder, Gottfried John, *Philosophical Writings* trans, ed, Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48

forms the basis of the nation,”²⁶³ then it was clearly imperative for Hungary to both preserve and develop its language as a mere matter of survival. The importance of language, while perhaps not always viewed in this light, remained vital to Hungarian national identity, and due to the importance of language in literature, clearly weighed heavily upon its writers as well. In the 1970s and 1980s, the theme of language became both a conduit of encoded social commentary, a challenge in the shadow of Kádárism’s cultural politics, as well as a medium of irony and wit.

The still pervasive theme of linguistic preservation of the national heritage and language as a sign of the “health” of the nation is transposed onto the modern discourse through a parodying of Danish national identity in “Logbook,” by Géza Ottlik. Ottlik’s story is of course aimed at the idiosyncrasies of Hungarian national identity, projecting its qualities onto a fictional Denmark, which is described landlocked, now a fraction of its original historical size, and placing its national hopes in the Danish athlete Astrid in a sports competition. The irony of Ottlik’s staging is clearly in the mockery of national identity equated with territorial size, existential fears, and exaggerations of the achievements of its nationals- which, it is to be recalled, was sociologically proven and termed “in-group tendencies”²⁶⁴ by Csepeli in his study on national identity. All of these ideas, however, revolve around the primary importance of language.

Echoing his discussion of German and the fact that “grammar and reasoning about language has weakened [German’s] richness”²⁶⁵ as well as its ability to portray certain concepts and objects with the same degree of synonyms as an ancient language such as Hebrew, protagonist Maandygard and his companion discuss the ability of the language

²⁶³ Ibid, 50.

²⁶⁴ Csepeli, *Hungarian National Identity*, 13.

²⁶⁵ Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 35.

Maori, whose capacity to articulate concepts nonexistent in Danish they consider superior to their native tongue.²⁶⁶ Through this ability to convey these deeper meanings with “meta-language,” they determine that the Maori culture itself, ancient as it was, is therefore also superior to Danish, perhaps explaining why Denmark finds itself in its current depressed state.²⁶⁷ This has a powerful effect on the captain Maanydgard, whose note-taking skills in the ship’s log-book are all that is left after the loss of all Danish sea ports. Rather than filling in the typical blocks concerning coordinates or wind conditions, he focuses on the “remarks” column in a persistent ritual of recording “his own daily activities and morale, the prevailing mood of his own discipline and confidence- with, of course, as much accuracy as possible.”²⁶⁸ Again, Ottlik displays through the irrationality of his characters the humor in the gravity they assign to the preservation and development of language above all other national characteristics in securing and furthering one’s own nation. After such comparisons, Maandygard decides to simply give up writing one morning, ironically on the same day that Astrid achieves her athletic victory.²⁶⁹

The portrayal of language as a genuine determinant of national difference and the treatment of its negative consequences was also a serious consideration in delimiting the uses of national identity as a sense of social cohesion, or at least, in shedding light on the implication of its divisive potential. Such is the subject in the short story “Forest,” by György Spiró , which deepens into a discussion that returns to the question of carrying the national tradition through the medium of poetry and writing and the threat posed by the grandiosity of one culture- in this case, Russian- versus the involuntarily humility of a historically defeated Hungarian. In the story the competition between a Hungarian man and his unfaithful wife

²⁶⁶ Géza Ottlik, “Logbook,” in *A Hungarian Quartet* (Budapest: Corvina, 1991), 21.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 28.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 16.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 28

and her Russian lover whom they visit adopts a potentially nationalist character entirely fabricated in the mind of its protagonist. The magnification of his personal conflict is exacerbated by his wife's lifelong fascination with the Russian language. He states, "It was the Russian language that his wife was in love with...her fanaticism found its object in Russian literature."²⁷⁰ In the eyes of her husband, it is this fixation on the Russian language which draws her to her Russian lover. With this, he realizes, he cannot compete, and with utter resentment resigns himself to the notion that he will indeed lose her, just as Hungary could never successfully defeat Russia; it is simply not in the nation's fate. While observing his wife's lover reciting Russian poetry by heart, "he did realize that the beautiful, slender Ashkenazi boy was in this moment the high priest of the mind of the Russian people, while he had been the high priest of the mind of the Hungarian people at the time his wife had fallen in love with him."²⁷¹ Spiro's narrative, unlike that of that described above, therefore confronts such thoughts of what may appear almost farcical to an outside observer, but which are portrayed as entirely understandable, even plausible in the story. Not only does it reveal the extent to which Hungarian national identity has been affected by tensions with its neighbors, it contains a cautionary tone towards the consideration of language and even culture as unchecked supporters of national identity without some measure of reality.

The Tragic Irony of the Plan

While nearly every work discussed in this chapter fits into the category of irony at least in part if not as the dominant theme of the work, it is interesting here to show the parallel tragedy of irony of a single individual with that of socialist society centered on the irreconcilability of the "Plan." Again the incomprehensibility and trauma of some events and

²⁷⁰ György Spiró, "Forest," *An Island of Sound*, ed. George Szirtes and Miklós Vajda (London: Harvill, 2004), 342-3.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 339-40.

the almost farcical nature of others in the 20th century history of Hungary are taken into the hands of these writers, serving- or mocking- their function as record-keepers of the national identity, expressing these simultaneously collective and personal emotions in whatever means they find appropriate, and ultimately, possible.

The function of irony also reveals a general sentiment in line with that of the national insecurities expressed above and the anxieties of change and continuity inherent to the Hungarian society in this period. Here *The City Builder* and its author György Konrád provide insight into the exploration of the darker element of societal reflection in the irony of his narrative. Its discovery by Konrád's narrator also reflects the awareness of the conflict, as was readily identifiable in the *raison d'être* of socialism in Hungary, without the ability to remedy it without dismantling his own power and life purpose. The "Plan" described in these recollections of the city planner in Konrád's novel is highly referential to his earlier discussion of intellectuals as a rising class, deriving "teleological" meaning from their central planning function.

Through his continuously unfolding stream of thoughts the own personal realization of Konrád's narrator is simultaneously revealed to the reader: that his stark belief in "the Plan" and his adoption of the state itself into his own person in order to carry this out was in itself the ultimate irony. He describes the process of his rise to power alongside the rise of the socialist state; as his intentions become harmonized with its goals and structures, he is able to exculpate himself in relation to society, noting, "If I contain in me the entire state, then my stupidities become risk-free state errors."²⁷² While Konrád is not exculpating his protagonist here, he certainly gives a fictional voice to the misled, class-conscious (or unconscious) intelligentsia.

²⁷²Konrád, *The City Builder*, 83

Viewing himself as “the most manlike man” because he carries in himself “God, whose other name is Plan,”²⁷³ he imagines his role as city planner as one that is even able to supersede, or at least break away from, the power residing in God. His logic finds within God the critical fault of dependency: “if God were really almighty, he would be forever reaching His goals, and would not have to attain infinity through matter. His desperation is betrayed by His works: He has to share His rule with Lucifer, who possesses black knowledge, who reminds him of His errors and of the havoc wreaked by His runaway creations.”²⁷⁴ He is in essence as a planner able to achieve that which God cannot- carrying out His Plan- and therefore no longer needs him.

Yet his very assumption of power within the socialist state comes to mirror the faulted image he identified in God, that which is dependent on the executor of his Plan and the redemption of his own mistakes, the “runaway creations” of his own city. Therefore he, too, is subject to the harsh realization that “we couldn’t be owners, only directors.”²⁷⁵ The impact of this personal revelation conveys a very poignant remark on the ironic character of the Hungarian national experience with socialism and the fallacies of power structures that Konrád’s discussions on the nature of the intelligentsia as a class also address. Konrád’s placing it in the inner conflict of one individual also reveals the exaggerated sense of legitimacy and purpose given to the Plan, which is a concept seen not only typologized in the novel but also in the discussions of Hungarian dictatorship over needs above. The Marxist conceptualization of the societal damage incurred by the perversion of socialism, for instance,

²⁷³ Ibid., 90.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 90

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 80

is itself an inherently ironic construction, insofar as the dictatorial quality originates ostensibly in the name of eradicating societal oppression through difference.²⁷⁶

Sexuality as Societal Metaphor

The treatment of sexuality is a theme that, understood in a paradigm of works written concerning national identity as such, serves many elucidating purposes. The broader theme of sexuality can be broken down into several subthemes; here, the focus is on sexuality in its literal form, that is, related to the individual body and relations between them, as well as the concept of sexuality and the metaphor used to illustrate a political concept. Recalling literary critic Elaine Feinstein's identification in the poet György Petri the character of postmodern Hungarian authors' and poets' understanding of politics as perceiving everything through "sex and death," has particular relevance here.²⁷⁷ Feinstein's comment also illuminates the further point that sexuality differentiates itself from other themes in that it belongs to the personal sphere, and as such is heavily focused on the individual. The resolutely private character of sexuality is, then, an interesting point of departure for writers creating works with the greater goal of addressing Hungarian society.

The presence of sexuality in the writings of Péter Nádas serves as an example of this first, literal representation of sexuality through extreme attention to the body and the sensual aspects of human relationships. What is most relevant here is not only the fascination with sexuality and the many forms it takes in the novel's separate plotlines, but the much greater meaning Nádas- and his characters- assign them. Literary critic Gábor Csordás notes the concept of "corporal synecdoche" in the novel, that is, the construction of the greater narrative through an emphasis on a part- here, sexuality- "since every event in the first

²⁷⁶ Vajda, *State and Socialism*, 123-130.

²⁷⁷ Feinstein, *Eternal Monday*, 9.

instance is an event of bodies that act upon one another...every experience and situation thereby falls directly into a complex system of relationship of the novel's localities, and historical contexts."²⁷⁸ Yet as Csordás notes, Nádas' detailed descriptions serve not only as parts of a whole, but the entire narrative is *literally* constructed through attention to the body and bodily interactions. In this way, Nádas achieves the *incorporation* of the larger story- for his purposes, the preoccupations of Hungarian society under the totalitarian regime in the 1950s .

Nadas' narrator appears often like a slave to detail,; when narrating his own life, he often describes his erotic homosexual relationship with the poet Melchior. Such observations of his lover fulfill the function of Nádas' transposition of the political into a corporeal form: "a German, a face exuding seriousness, patience, humorless self respect, a democratic face, if there is such a thing..."²⁷⁹ Even in his facial anatomy he embeds a politically charged observation of his nationality in his description.

The emphasis on the sexual in the recollections of his protagonist's interactions with others, even as his childhood circle of friends in 1950s Hungary ,conveys a disturbing amount of jealousy, sexual tension and *Schadenfreude* among young adults that Nadás appears to be showing is not only a sign of the times but an incorporation of it. They mirror the intrigues of his parents and their friends, which are loaded with both sexual and political significance, signifying also the internalization of the political and social tensions and anxieties in the traumatic atomization of the society they live in. Nádas asks, noting the way in which the larger consternations of Hungary as a nation has been absorbed into the very physicality of

²⁷⁸ Gábor Csordás, "The Body of the Text: Corporeal Writing in Péter Nádas's 'Parallel Stories'" *Eurozine* (2006) 2.

²⁷⁹ Nádas, *A Book of Memories*, 8

his parents: “How could we have known that our relationship reenacted repeated and copied in a playfully exaggerated form...our parents’ ideals and also their ruthless practices, and to some extent the publicly proclaimed ideals and ruthless practices of the period as well?”²⁸⁰

Nádas builds a microcosm of Hungarian society told through the sexual interactions between generations, family members and even between children. It becomes clear in these personal relations and extended moments of physical interaction just how pervasive the political and societal perversions of the past really are, and that it is on this level that one can observe the national impact of socialist society- precisely as it filters down to a single individual, as Nádas has literally built a corpus out of these fragmented memories. Politics has divided his characters and penetrated every relation, and no amount of intimate contact will restore it to its previous state. In this way Nádas draws together the extent of the destructiveness of socialism –from the terror of the 1950s to the humiliations of post-1956. These traumas remain as physical and mental wounds in them, as Nádas seems to imply they remain in all of society.

Péter Esterházy’s *A Little Hungarian Pornography* engages sexuality in a way entirely different from that of Nádas, where sexuality, specifically in the form of pornography, functions as a continual metaphor, conveying in its essence, among other meanings, the characterization of the relationship between the socialist state and Hungarian society. Esterházy defines pornography in his Preface as a “lie,” going on to explain its connection to Hungarian society: “let us imagine...if we can, a country where everything is a lie, where the lack of democracy is called socialist democracy, economic chaos socialist economy, revolution anti-revolution, and so on...That is the pornography. The lies of the

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 342

body, the lies of the soul.”²⁸¹ For Esterházy, sexuality-pornography is an explanatory mechanism, rather than internationalization of societal problems. His designation of the relationship between state and society as pornographic certainly conjures an image of and unequal and exploitative relationship, though not without a certain measure of irony.

Esterházy also dedicates an entire section of his highly disjointed book entitled “anecdotes” to on what appears to be a discussion of politics and history but is revealed in the author’s notes to be quotations from an “comprehensive study of female sexuality in which 3,019 woman between 14-78 ‘about their most intimate concerns’” entitled “the *Hite Report*,”²⁸² where the words “orgasm,” “masturbation,” “woman,” and “man” are transposed as “democratic experience,” “self-delusion,” “Kurucz,,” and “Labancz,,” respectively. Clearly Esterházy’s references to eighteenth-century pro- and anti-Habsburg camps and democracy as code terms for sexual themes not only deprive them of their political potency, but it turns the idea of censorship on its head- by substituting the original text with the controversial political terms that would attract official attention, rather than the other way around. Also, his placement of the two concepts of raw sexual terminology and the hallowed diametric political allegiances of the Hungarian historical canon imply once again Esterházy’s approach to the situation that he finds necessary to parody in order to explain it.

Through the treatment of the abstract concepts of memory, death, irony, tragedy and sexuality, the above works contribute to a larger conversation on the thematic concern of national identity, contingent on the confrontation of both past and present. By exploiting the potential of writers to articulate such themes through their representation and embedding them in a literary form, the writers here also reinforced their role as active participants in the

²⁸¹ Esterházy, Péter. *A Little Hungarian Pornography*. Translated by Judith Sollosy. London: Quartet Books, 1995

²⁸² Ibid, 213.

same discourse on society as their academic counterparts. They also apply their literary insight into the period to evaluate through these representative concepts the present state of contemporary Hungary in a way that other disciplines do not- and cannot. These works are evidence of the intuitive authority of writers in Hungarian society to take on this identity of the nation and submit it to a thematic reworking that compliments –and preserves, when necessary- its essence, even in the modern era.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show the plurality and intricacy of the discourse on Hungarian national identity through deliberate reworking and expansion of the various aspects of Hungarian society. This comprehensive broadening and deepening of the social fabric was the response of Hungarian intellectuals to the bolstering of their national identity. The reengagement of these themes discussed above, whether in symbolic or literal form, encouraged the self-reproducing dialogue of the individual with society, but more importantly, provided a space and a suggestion of a form for the society with which the individual may identify. It has been shown through emphasis on just a select few of these issues, including the regional identity and character of Hungarian historical identity parallel to its peculiarities and deviations from it; the empirical and philosophical consideration of the image and composition of a yet unrealized socio-political identity; and the reworking of the complexities and contradictions of the past that influences this identity what those behind the works conceived of as important to fostering the development of a society with which they too as individuals would seek to identify. This was the factor of cohesion among the otherwise divergent and diversified collection of writings analyzed here.

Chapter III. National Minorities

Whereas previous analyses in this thesis have shown that historical and literary work addressing earlier periods and the recent history of the 20th century were highly referential to the events of the present day, here it will be shown how the contemporary problem of Hungarian national minorities living in neighboring socialist countries led to reengagement with, but more importantly also mirrored, the views of the past. It also marks a point where the past and the present meet in a single issue, one which required a critical treatment of the past as well as a contemporary perspective on the events and conditions affecting Hungarians outside of Hungarian borders. Moreover, it will be shown the effect this one issue exacted upon national identity of Hungarians among themselves and the ever important image of a national identity clearly altered by these conditions and the discourse around them.

It has been discussed previously that national identity became a salient issue for Hungarian society in the simultaneously transformative and static atmosphere of Kádárism in the 1970s and 1980s. Inextricably tied to many factors already discussed here, that of Hungarian minorities became perhaps the most affecting in terms of national sentiment in its formulation and its expression. Pierre Kende introduces his own study on Hungarian minorities with the statement, “It is no exaggeration to say that, particularly toward the last years of the seventies, Hungarian national consciousness erupted anew with an unforeseen force and liveliness.” This small insight coincides, among other developments tied into the overall liberalization of the period, with the unfolding of events related to the situation of

Hungarian minorities and the increased engagement of society- and in small measure, the regime as well.²⁸³

It is no coincidence that the increasing of both national consciousness among Hungarians and the eminence of the problem of Hungarian minorities were mutually informing. This was yet another reality for intellectuals concerning themselves with the national question, and it is the atmosphere created by this issue that had a significant influence on its very articulation, particularly that which was perceived outside of Hungary. Intellectual attempts to square the circle on the precarious issue of Hungarian minorities show not only that the issue of national minorities has resurfaced; it reveals that in large part Hungarian nationalism had taken the form of concern for its compatriots abroad as one of its only ways to express itself. The exclusivity of this one medium consistently dictated the articulations seen here in this section. The following will seek not to present the entire discourse on Hungarian national minorities, a task too ambitious to be encapsulated in the space here. Nor is such an ambition worthwhile for this thesis, where the available texts will only address certain aspects of this question and will be viewed not with the purpose of identifying the discourse but rather displaying *how* it was formulated.

The Exportation of Hungarian National Identity

Domestic Disempowerment

The issue of Hungarian minorities as a 20th century phenomenon was rooted in the redrawing of borders as a result of the peace agreement made at Trianon after WWI, forming new nation-states out of the constitutive elements of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.²⁸⁴ In

²⁸³ Pierre Kende, "Communist Hungary and the Hungarian Minorities," in *Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, ed. Stephen Borsody (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), 281.

²⁸⁴ Miklós Duray, "The European ideal: Reality or Wishful Thinking in Eastern Central Europe?" *In Search of Central Europe*, eds. György Schöpflin and Nancy Wood (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989), 99.

addition to the loss of two thirds of its territory, Hungary was simultaneously in the midst of recovering from the fallout of the dissolution of the Monarchy and its unstable domestic situation before the treaty was even signed.²⁸⁵ Besides the obvious negative reception to the territorial reduction was a more practical concern precipitated by the new nation-state formations in the region: now there were large pockets of those that considered themselves ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungarian territory. From this point forward—acknowledging here, of course, the wealth of differing opinions on the history that followed—the presence of these now-minorities abroad remained a central political and social problem. As many countries of the region aligned their policies to mirror those of Stalin, the dictatorial tendencies of the 1950s raised concerns of outside observers for all minorities living under such conditions.

Domestically, however, the regime remained virtually silent, to the great consternation of many Hungarians; such behavior did not change with the instatement of János Kádár despite many other attempts to appease society in order to bolster his regime's legitimacy. Indeed the primacy of the Soviet pressure not to engage in conflict with a "brother state,"²⁸⁶ especially as problems escalated in Romania in the 1970s, became a sticking point for the Kádár regime, whose hesitation in antagonizing a fellow Warsaw Pact state was viewed with growing frustration within Hungarian society. Historian Pierre Kende expresses no sense of optimism towards the Kádár regime's acting outside of Soviet interests in this respect. He states, "the little Entente syndrome surrounding Hungary still prevails. However, officially, proletarian internationalism rules."²⁸⁷ Not only was the mandate of

²⁸⁵ Anikó Kovacs-Bertrand, *Der Ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: der publizistische Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon (1918-1931)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1997), 39-43.

²⁸⁶ György Dalos, „Ceasescu isolieren!“ Informationsgespräch über die Situation in Rumänien, "Argumente" (Oct.1988), 37-8.

²⁸⁷ Kende, "Communist Hungary," 283.

socialism to overlook conflict between nations in the greater interest of socialist unity, the threat of repeated military intervention from the Soviet Union was also in the minds of the leadership.²⁸⁸

There were, of course, some attempts at influencing the situation from within Hungary despite the pressures of *Sozialismustreu*, with very limited success. The Populists, who took on this issue as one of its central concerns, expressed their demands through the voice of Gyula Illyes or Sándor Csoori, which emerged from time to time in response to the escalation of tensions in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁸⁹ The democratic opposition also made it a point to engage this issue in its samizdat publications. Yet they too were greatly inhibited by their environment and were forced to turn to their own connections outside of Hungary in order to make their impact. Kende notes also similar developments among the historical community, whose collaborations with historians abroad had even led to “[resuming the scholarly task of detached investigation of facts.”²⁹⁰ Whether or not this was true, the fact remained that the “facts” were contestable on the official level, and therefore Hungarian historians were just as hindered by their literary counterparts in enforcing any real change.

Therefore for those living and writing within Hungary, the precariousness of writing about the national minorities issue reduced their commentary to a muted tone. The involvement on this topic presented Hungarians with the challenge of circumventing the authority of socialism, and was therefore exported in large part to those outside the limits of the socialist sphere. Indeed there were efforts made by Hungarians in the international scene throughout the socialist period to call attention to the situation of Hungarian minorities, as

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 274.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 283-5.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

will be shown below. The resonance of the issue abroad is visible in the treatment of the problem in the international media in the late 1970s into the 1980s, whose attention was particularly directed at the oppressive Ceausescu regime and the daunting conditions for the many minorities living within Romania.

International Attention

There are records from German, French, British, and American news sources from this period, showing the extent to which the international community was invested in the ongoing coverage of the issue. For instance, an article from 1978 in the German newspaper *Die Welt* from November 21, 1978, entitled, “Bukarest Bedrängt Ungarn in Siebenbürgen,” reports that there are several types of “discrimination”²⁹¹ occurring in the region, primarily of a cultural nature and with regards to education. It closes, “The problem of the Hungarian minority in Siebenbürgen is one of the most difficult national questions in Eastern Europe.”²⁹²

Further evidence of the international relevance of the situation of Hungarian minorities is also found in the press coverage of two individuals, the poet Gyula Illyes and the Czechoslovak sociologist Miklós Duray. Illyes became embroiled in a war of words in 1978 with some of his Romanian counterparts, as the French newspaper *Le Monde* reports in its October 16 article “The Fate of the Hungarian Minority in Transylvania Continues to Aggravate Relations between Hungary and Romania.” Illyes, who was not new to this conflict, and had voiced his opinions and concerns on several occasions in the past in his populist capacity. For instance, in the article “Illyes Defines Mission of Poet in Life of Nation” from June 28, 1978 in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Illyes states: “I am not a

²⁹² Ibid.

nationalist and rather fear national chauvinistic explosions of violence...[but] why should the biggest national minority in Europe [the Hungarians in Romania] not have a right to autonomy since it concerns two socialist neighbor countries, especially?”²⁹³

According to the *Le Monde* article, Illyes’ comments made in the *Magyar Nemzet* regarding the “policy of assimilation in Romania...in veiled terms” garnered a scathing reaction within Romania, where he was accused of espousing “obsessional anti-Romanianism,” leading to

an “anti-Horthyist campaign” in the press. The response to an “attack” from Romanian writer Minhea Gheorio in a publication of the Romanian Writers’ Union was actually formulated by the historian Zsigmond Pal Pach, according to an RFE/RL report entitled “Hungarian Historian Pleads for Sober and Objective Discussion of Minority Rights in Romania,” from July 11, 1978, who came to Illyes’ defense in *Elet és Irodalom*, claiming Illyes was not expressing “supernationalist,” “chauvinist,” or “fascist” tendencies. This example shows how such verbal assaults so easily escalated into national insults that attracted the attention of not only writers on both sides but the party leadership and media as well.

The case of Miklós Duray was slightly more high-profile; his trial and arrest in 1983 led to a petition written by American writers Susan Sontag and Kurt Vonnegut and critic Irving Howe to the Hungarian prime minister posted in the New York Review of Books. Duray, targeted for publishing a report on the situation of Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, was often the subject of abuse for his leadership in the cause of minority rights and his formation of the Committee for the Legal Protection of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia. The letter calls on the Hungarian government to take action, even if it meant

intervening in Slovakian affairs: “Were the Hungarian government to neglect this, it would contribute, by its silence, to a violation of the Helsinki Agreement. In fact, your government would surrender to the dangerously growing forces of extreme nationalism,” noting also that “The Hungarian government was not afraid to intervene in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs in August 1968.”²⁹⁴

The “New Nationalism” and Narratives of the National Minorities Problem

A first consideration brought to the forefront by the national minorities issue is the composition of Hungarian nationalism itself. As has been shown in the writings of István Bibó and, in this thesis, the studies by Szucs and Csepeli,²⁹⁵ Hungarian nationalism is associated with the Central and Eastern European tendency towards language and culture, rather than legal or institutional bonds to the state, as is common in Western European models. This is also corroborated by the research of nationalism scholars presented in the theoretical section.²⁹⁶ This is so relevant for the Hungarian situation, firstly, for the lack of territorial continuity in its 20th century history. This is significant when juxtaposed with the trans-border nature of Hungarian nationalism, which, because of the emphasis placed on language and culture, still includes Hungarians living in other states as members of the larger Hungarian national community based on these criteria. The nature of Hungarian nationalism was made even more precarious in the 1970s and 1980s for the precedent set in the interwar period and into the Second World War. Kende acknowledges this fact, “the mere expression of interest by Hungarians in the fate of their compatriots in these countries is identified with

²⁹⁴Irwing Howe, Susan Sontag, Kurt Vonnegut, “The Case of Miklós Duray,” open letter, March 21, 1983, *New York Review of Books* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/6270> (accessed: April 20, 2009).

²⁹⁵ See: Chs. 1-2.

²⁹⁶ See: “Theoretical Approaches.”

territorial revisionisms of the interwar Horthy era.”²⁹⁷ Hungarian “revisionism”²⁹⁸ as a negative and extreme manifestation of Hungarian nationalist aims clearly remained in the minds of the region in the decades to follow.

While Hungarian national identity may not have maintained revisionist ambitions reminiscent of the Horthy era in the 1970s and 1980s, the increased interest in the sociological nature of Hungarian national identity led to some forewarning conclusions in the study of sociologist György Csepeli, “Structures and Contents of Hungarian National Identity: Results of Political Socialization and Cultivation.” In this work referenced above for its theoretical framework, Csepeli expresses concern over the negative influence of the minorities question on domestic national identity. His implicit criticism of the Kádár regime’s reaction to the escalating international tensions and tone of urgency also show how damaging this question of minorities had become in an atmosphere where the nation was subject to such substantial reworking. It was in this transitional period that a societal question so central to the mechanisms of personal association with a collective could push the already vulnerable national identity completely off-balance. He states, “the domestic reaction...could become a destabilizing factor in Hungarian society should the Hungarian reform process become stalled.”²⁹⁹ Therefore such criticisms, even if preemptory, were indicative that careful handling of the minorities situation even in Hungary was an appropriate measure.

The portrayal of Hungarian nationalism free from the mutations of the past is highly related to a second consideration; that of the challenge to those engaged in promoting the cause of national minorities in the international community. Due the very nature of the issue, this international aspect was unavoidable, as its focus connected Hungarians living within its

²⁹⁷ Kende, “Hungarian Communists,” 276.

²⁹⁸ See: Kovács-Bertrand, *Der Ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*.

²⁹⁹ Csepeli, “Hungarian National Identity,” 102.

legal borders with those outside of its jurisdiction. Therefore accounts of Hungarian history related to the question of minorities and nationality required a level of sensitivity towards the contested events of the past. This demanded significant reformulation of Hungarian nationalism in order to create as much distance as possible from the territorial ambitions and turn to the emphasis on cultural and linguistic ties between Hungarians across borders. This is particularly visible in those texts attempting to show the long-term experience of nationalities in the region in order to make sensible commentary on the debacles of the present.

A natural starting point for the question of the problems origins in modern times is the Reform Era in Hungary and the 1848-49 period. Here one may refer back to the discussion of nationalities in 19th century historiography, which identified this problem as one of the foremost in inhibiting the success of the Revolution, and specifically to the reference made by Spira to the Danubian Confederation circulated by Hungarian exiles in the 1850s. The precedent set here saw an interesting return with Hungarian expatriates as early as 1952, as historian Stephen Borsody, combining ideas with turn of the century federalist Oszkár Jászi, attempted to gather momentum for the federalist movement in an American publication entitled *Freedom and Union*. Borsody and Jászi appealed to the international community from within the Atlantic Unionist movement,³⁰⁰ whose American publication *Freedom and Union* featured such articles as “Let ‘Free’ Danubian Federalists Unite.”³⁰¹ While Borsody operated outside the Hungarian milieu and Jászi became an American citizen after fleeing Hungary,³⁰² the Atlantic strategy has obvious parallels to that of exiled leader Lajos Kossuth in 1848-9.

³⁰⁰ György Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oszkár Jászi: 1875-1957* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 510

³⁰¹ Stephen Borsody, “Let ‘Free’ Danubian Federalists Unite,” *Freedom and Union* (1952).

³⁰² Litván, *Twentieth-Century Prophet*, 510.

Yet besides references to precedents set on confederations, there were also questions more grounded in their Hungarian contexts, such as the true nature of relations between liberal reformers and the nationalities during the revolutionary period. In this context, special attention was due to the union with Transylvania, one of the Twelve Points presented on 15 March that was realized in the short period before the defeat of the Revolution in 1849.³⁰³ Historiography regarding Transylvania was not without due controversy. When in 1985 a History of Transylvania was published in Hungary by the Hungarian Academy of Science,³⁰⁴ the legacy of this complicated period in relations between Hungarians in Hungary proper and those elites orchestrating revolution in Transylvania was undoubtedly still a historically sensitive subject. The problem was exacerbated in the 1980s as well by the waves of refugees entering Hungary from Romania, tangible proof of the deterioration of conditions within the country. The release of the monograph on the history of Transylvania saw not only a negative response among intellectuals, but it was faced with a press campaign launched in Romania against it, and resulted in Ceausescu making an open speech against its release and calling for the ban of all Hungarian publications in Romania.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, tracing the antagonistic relations built up during this period, not only those between Hungarians and Romanians, was clearly also a relevant point of discussion for historians focusing on this issue.

Perhaps even more significant than the historical inquiry into the 19th century was the historiography of nationalities problems in the early 20th. Implicit in much of this writing was the importance of international developments in determining the course of Hungary's recent history and the idea that the burden of national minorities should be borne on an international

³⁰³ Spira, *Nationalities Issue*, 12.

³⁰⁴ Apor and Trencsényi, "Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past," 5.

³⁰⁵ Dalos, "Ceausescu Isolieren!" 37.

level as well. Not only was this Hungarian historical problem integrated into a greater regional context, it was relevant to the whole of Europe, and was directly connected to the international relations of the great powers during both World Wars. Such concerns were intended to echo in the conference halls of Western Europe and engage as much of an international solution as possible, in view of the reality of Hungary's relative weakness in international politics. Therefore reference was not only to be made to the results of long-term developments within Hungarian society and political culture, but also to the larger events of the 20th century.

The two World Wars are clearly also relevant topics of discussion for this purpose, for example in Duray's reference to Hungarian territorial nationalist claims as its reasoning for joining the Axis powers in WWII.³⁰⁶ He also finds fault in the lack of constitutional protection for minorities in the proliferation of new states after WWI, though he disagrees with the notion that the Austro-Hungarian Empire's inability to resolve the nationalities issue was the cause of its dissolution; rather he attributes this to a clash of "power and national interests" that ultimately led to its demise. In the final analysis, he says, the reality is that most of Central Europe "slowly but surely surrendered to totalitarianism,"³⁰⁷ placing the blame on the region itself, though of course not exclusively on Hungary. His reference to the inability to overcome the decisions made at Yalta as the cause of Central Europe's modern day ills also recalls Konrád's reference in *Antipolitics* to the "three old men" that solidified a "pact between Anglo-Saxon and Soviet imperialism,"³⁰⁸ that are hardly subject to misinterpretation.

³⁰⁶ Duray "The European Ideal," 105.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 98.

³⁰⁸ Konrád, *Antipolitics*, 1.

Similar views were also expressed on the West and the Soviet Union's historical hand in events; one can hear György Szabad's voice in his not subtly stated conviction that the great powers lacked a moral sense in the 19th century and were bound to repeat such mistakes in the future.³⁰⁹ Francois Fejto describes the behavior of the Soviet Union and its role in determining the fate of Hungary as a member of the negotiating table at both Versailles and Yalta as largely self-interested, leaving Hungary to its own devices. The Soviet Union's "favorable predisposition toward Hungary"³¹⁰ after the Bolshevik Revolution quickly changed, explains Fejto in his "The Soviet Union and the Hungarian Question," as it began a shift towards "Realpolitik" and away from the original Leninist policy of supporting self-determination.³¹¹ The Soviet Union was in turn the harshest towards Hungary after the Second World War, who found it easier to act as a "protector of Czech nationalism"³¹² and allow for "the brutal treatment meted out to the German and Hungarian minorities" that he calls "a sad disavowal of the humanism of Tomas G. Masaryk."³¹³ Meanwhile Kende accuses the Soviet Union's "interest in the status quo"³¹⁴ as a factor "uniquely detrimental to national interests" after WWII in "Communist Hungary and the Hungarian Minorities," recalling the "guilty nation" stamp imposed upon Hungary after its occupation.³¹⁵ Duray likewise adds his own criticism of the League of Nations for doing little in the way of supporting minorities, including those of Hungarian origin.³¹⁶

³⁰⁹ See: Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 161.

³¹⁰ Fejto, "The Soviet Union and the Hungarian Question," 90.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 93.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Kende, "Hungarian Communists," 274.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 275.

³¹⁶ Miklós Duray, "Political Problems of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia" (Indiana, PA: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5

The Internationalized Appeal- The Case of Miklós Duray

In order to contextualize the problem in its modern context, such references to international oversight of the situation and Western conceptions of human rights functioned in tandem with presenting a history that incited Western participation in solving the national minorities question. In essence, Hungarians acting on behalf of Hungarian minorities were tasked with the literal translation of the Central European problem into a European one, through use of proper terminology- to Helsinkiize their rhetoric. Here the work of Miklós Duray is highly instructive. His initiative to form the Committee for the Protection of Legal Rights of somebody was a case in point; it not only appealed to the international community, but it sought legal recourse for the grievances of these minorities and attempted to codify the respect of minority rights- essentially a reflection of the intentions behind Helsinki, but also a reflection of a Western legal approach to redressing these alleged transgressions. Now maltreatment was not only an abstract notion, it had become a violation of human rights, that is, a violation of the law. At the same time, the Danubian Confederation idea resurfaces as a possibly acceptable strategy, as were moral appeals to uphold the Helsinki Accords or toughen up the mandate of the United Nations, all bound together to reflect the eminence of this problem in international affairs.

Duray, who had become known for his illumination of the mistreatment of Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, formed the Committee for the Legal Protection of Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia (CSMKJB) in 1978, an action not without controversy, as he was arrested for “subversion” in 1982 and again in 1984. Yet as stated above, the international attention to his cause was influential in bringing about his release in 1985. Behind Duray’s cause were such groups as Amnesty International, the Czech Charter 77, the Czech VONS Committee, which functioned as a kind of Helsinki watch committee, and a number of

Czechoslovak and Hungarian intellectuals.³¹⁷ Undoubtedly the effectiveness of his own work was bolstered by his own approach to the situation from a legal and political standpoint, appealing at length to international colleagues in the United States and in Europe at universities and human rights law groups.

His appeals centered on not only historical grievances but the lack of institutionalized minority protection in the socialist governments, which according to Duray for Hungarians went from bad to worse as they were placed under constitutional authority of Slovakia in the late 1960s.³¹⁸ Hence his creation of the CSMKJB, which he says owes its survival to the Helsinki Accords, and his report on the political participation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia in the past 70 years. Here he describes its “deterioration” under socialism, the disruptions caused by administrative-territorial reorganization within Slovakia in 1960 that “eliminated communities”³¹⁹ as well as the destruction of cultural life and public education for Hungarians. His notoriety enabled him to recall similar historical events such as the expulsion of Hungarians and Germans from Czechoslovakia after WWII, or the “Machiavellianism of [Czechoslovakia’s] leaders”³²⁰ in referring to the interwar period.. He also expresses his discontent with the the hypocrisy of the Allied mentality to emphasize national self-determination with disregarding the challenge of protecting those within these new borders.³²¹ His modern-day assessment carries a similar tone; he is disappointed with the response of the United Nations and the relative weakness behind the Helsinki Accords. Without naming them, he too reiterates the consequences “peace settlements after both world wars” as adding to the minorities problem.

³¹⁷ Mary Hrabik Samal, “The Case of Miklos Duray,” *Cross Currents* 4(1985), 41.

³¹⁸ Duray, “Political Problems,” 6.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 3-4.

³²⁰ Ibid., 3.

³²¹ Duray, “The European Ideal,” 101.

Conclusion

These appeals to the international community as well as inquiries into the past as explanatory measures for the problems of the present show how Hungarian national identity was largely internationalized when seen through this paradigm. Left without other outlets for the expression of national identity under the political circumstances, the general aims of achieving a identity that expressed a sense of national self and a cohesion within society found its medium in this issue. Because this became the concern of individuals outside the borders of Hungary, the issue itself was exported to the international community, where the resultant “nationalism” and the history behind it had to be formulated in a particular way. That is, such expressions were required to be acceptable to their audience but yet able to articulate historical concerns such as the haphazard legacy of the Habsburg empire, the peculiarities of the Danubian region, and the relationship of Hungarians to other ethnic groups over time. At the same time, it was necessary to lay bare the unfairness of Western policies in the perception of Hungarians and call attention to the actual abuses towards Hungarian minorities in these countries in a way that engaged their support. The formulations seen here reflect this unique situation and the immediate transformative influence of the efforts to engage this problem on Hungarian national identity.

Conclusions

After having shown in three distinct sub-contexts the various elements of a discourse on Hungarian national identity, it is proper here to draw some conclusions on the findings. Firstly, there is much to be revealed here in the structure of the thesis, which in large part built itself based on the texts at hand and the findings from an analysis of them. It is therefore not in a spirit of conforming these writings to a specific scheme that was determined from the start, but rather to use an organizing principle of evolution, that by thematic association and similarity these texts were set to communicate with one another to the extent that they can in a structured framework. It will be recalled here that the stated motive behind the research is to first locate where possible the pluralism of academic and literary inquiry related to national identity, in order to then analyze these inquiries for their meaning. This is a broad criterion, but was used discriminately here, and thus there is a unifying principle for all these works.

That said, the first chapter, based on writings on the 19th century, deliberately focuses on this retrospective view, in line with the guiding principle that national identity is informed by the past of the nation. The 19th century was the richest of these time periods with regard to historiography, and because the period itself, namely that broadly centered on the years 1848-9 and 1867, has so much symbolic and literal value as the period containing the very origins of Hungarian national identity. Additionally, in light of the relative pluralism of historiographic schools interacting in the 1970s and 1980s, it is an interesting insight into the inter-workings of the historical community, and acts also as an indicator of the increasing diversification of ideas circulating in this period.

It is through the problematization of the themes found in this retrospection that the determining characteristics emerge for the following chapter. Indeed the primacy of the *embourgeoisement* discussion sets the parameters for a societal discourse, which indeed is

emphasized in the next chapter. The reintroduction of a bourgeois society with its values and its economic attributes opened the discourse to a host of other issues beyond the confines of a socialist system. The concomitant discussions of the legacy of liberalism, undoubtedly related to this issue as well, and the return to questions of political and governmental significance such as the parliamentary tradition, constitutionalism, and extension of civil rights signified similar possibilities for reintroducing some of these originally “Hungarian” values back into the discourse. That said, the second chapter attempts to follow this lead, and it is clear that the proliferation of works is based in this stimulus observed in the previous chapter. That is, the regional perspective of Hungarian history, the assessment of Hungarian national development in the *longue-durée*, the development of Hungarian society, and so on provide a wider survey of these intellectual trends taking part in the same discourse as the more protracted one based in the historiographic representations of the past.

The third chapter attempts to portray these themes in motion, as this is an instance of national identity not only formulated but employed by Hungarians as a reinforcement of social cohesion with Hungarians living outside the borders of the state. Even in its active manifestation there are commonalities with the themes in the discourse discussed in the preceding chapters, which was also shown. But having arrived at the application of national identity, it is prudent here to recall the tenets of national identity that served as theoretical guidelines for this thesis. As Csepeli and Smith note, there is a definite presence of ethnocentrism in Hungarian national identity, as there is in most Central and Eastern European identities. The “in-group” creation based on ethnic criteria is exemplified here in this chapter on national minorities, where the emphasis is on the Hungarian in-group against the others, particularly its Slav neighbors and the Soviet Union. The consternation shown by

the maltreatment of fellow nationals was evidence of this prioritization of the ethno-cultural over the legal-political.

Yet this is not the only characteristic of Hungarian national identity which coincides here with the theoretical guidelines set at the beginning of this thesis. In a more indirect way, the presence of the societal “system of communication” Csepeli refers to between individuals and society is also evident. This can be seen particularly in the second chapter discussing coming to terms with the past and reformulating a society out of its fragmented state. The negation of this isolation and atomization of a totalitarian system as indicated by Arendt, or the paralysis of society identified by Hankiss, is found in the efforts of the second chapter. Hence also the emphasis on society in the literature dealing with the long-term effects of an entire system seen in the Marxist discussions is inextricably tied to the emancipation of individuals from the pervasive party-state. This is tied in with a specifically *national* identity, for one, because this identification is found in the connection between society and the individual, as both Csepeli and Miller show. Secondly, in the case of Hungary, the national aspect of societal cultivation was also a means of separating society from the socialist system precisely to claim it as specifically Hungarian, to place a divide between the nation and the regime. Therefore it becomes clear that nation and society are mutually reinforcing, and identification with one in the discourse found here fosters the development of the other.

It is instructive to take here once again the study of Csepeli on Hungarian national identity in order to compare his findings with those discussed here based on observations in the discourse. Certainly his general assertion that “national identity satisfies the need to escape from the horror of emptiness through the operation of categories of consciousness,”³²² is applicable here and is connected to coming to terms with the totalitarian past seen in the

³²² Csepeli, *Hungarian National Identity*, 36.

literature from the period. The pieces focusing on characters struggling with the overwhelming nature of their past or expressing feelings of alienation and anxiety towards the future- one may recall here Nádas', Ottlik's, or to an extent Kornis' writings- are evidence of this societal effect identified by Csepeli. As has already been shown, this is a way of describing that social disintegration caused by the system they lived in. Csepeli then how this impulse plays out with regard to national identity; in cases the so-called "paralysis" of society, the individual is closed off from the existential recourse of identification with a larger group, and the vacuum left in its place has serious consequences for human behavior.³²³

On the national level, however, this same feeling of threat or uncertainty results in what Csepeli terms the "positive reaction to a negative stimulus," that he claims exists among Hungarians in the 1970s survey results. Based on the premise that "people's knowledge- their system of cognitive representations – contains mostly evaluations and probability judgments over and above the factual judgments needed for everyday praxis," the already ethnocentric "in-group"³²⁴ can easily revert from an "empirical" basis of national identity to an "ideological" conceptualization with the proper stimulus. This entails relying on a "belief system" rather than being guided by empirical reality, resulting in a disproportionate attention to the positive aspects of the in-group and the negative perception of those outside of it.³²⁵ While Csepeli sets out to prove that among individuals this "illusion of empirical validity"³²⁶ in their conception of the Hungarian identity, the findings here based on the national identity discourse does not reveal any of these tendencies.

³²³ Ibid., 42.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid., 97.

In the examples of the third chapter, one may anticipate the Csepeli notes this himself. Yet once again, though there may be hints of such tendencies, by and large these texts displayed a sense of restraint, which was indicated in the chapter. This does not disprove what Csepeli shows in his study, but rather illuminates the fact that there likely a marked, if not irreconcilable difference between a discourse among intellectuals and identifiable sentiments among the members of a nation. Csepeli warns in his study of the legitimacy crisis of the Kádár regime related to the inability to meet the needs of the members of Hungarian society, stating that there is already a “crisis in national identity.”³²⁷ He states,

Generations grew up in the belief that political, and not “national,” organs were acting in their place and for their interest. These organs were supposed to look after education, housing, health, meaningful and creative work, quality leisure time, the environment and any other human needs that might arise. It is obvious, however, that even societies starting with considerably greater social capital than Hungary would not have been able to undertake the completion of this program.³²⁸

This reality is indeed visible in the writings by Hankiss and the members of the Budapest School, and to an extent by Konrád and Szelényi as well; all note to some degree a crisis in the system centered on the legitimacy of the Kádár regime. Yet their preoccupation in this discourse is not based on this question, as it is accepted here as an established fact. Instead, the question is, as has been addressed here, how to proceed with this knowledge. But it does not indicate the far-reaching consequences that Csepeli claims for the national identity as such. A final quote by Csepeli sheds light on this difference, where he states that “The ethnocentric perspective necessarily distorts national history in its own objective reality.”³²⁹ Perhaps the discourse here is characterized by this very distortion in its “objective reality.” Yet the fact remains that in general the impression made by intellectuals writing in this period is one of a proactive rather than a nihilistic nature that Csepeli refers to. It may be that this is

³²⁷ Ibid., 102.

³²⁸ Ibid., 103.

³²⁹ Ibid., 78.

a manifestation of the intellectuals' image of society projected onto its assessments of it rather than a representation of reality; this is, of course, a central conflict for the intellectual addressed several times earlier in this thesis.

Still, this does not detract entirely from the merits of observing intellectual contributions to a society reemerging from a period of crisis and dissolution. Csepeli himself is justified in his conclusions as he calls for a widespread reform of societal institutions; he too in many ways intellectualizes even this reality. This highlights another crucial point: it is not only reality and the representation of reality that is in play here; a discourse, as has been repeatedly conveyed throughout this thesis, is not entirely invested in the exact replication of the existing situation. This is not to say that the entire discourse on national identity is an imagined one, but the observations in this thesis lead to the overall conclusion that the nature of such a discourse is to envision, to invoke, rather than to simply represent. To reiterate an earlier point in this context, there is a clear impression that the discourse on national identity in Hungary existed in large part to strengthen and support it through reinforcement of the society with which it was identified. Hence the importance placed on pluralism: it is the whole formed out of these many parts that signifies the possibility of transformation and regeneration.

Thus when confronted with such apprehensions as those articulated by Hankiss in his *East European Alternatives*, which pose the question as to whether or not society has been damaged beyond repair, the answer based strictly on these findings is a definite no. He states that perhaps "by undermining and eroding the anachronistic structures and institutions of the ancien régime, the crisis might in the long run open up the way to further development and

more freedom.”³³⁰ For Hankiss, this translates to the greater question for the nation itself in asking if “the country has, or has not, definitely lost its chance of catching up with the developed world and of getting back into the community of European nations.”³³¹ Yet the very fact that this occupied the minds of Hungarian intellectuals and that this formed such a crucial underlying component of the discourse seems to render this question no longer worth asking.

In light of these comments, it is worth repeating that the most instructive lesson of the findings here is the almost chaotic nature of the sources that at first glance seem to defy organization; in large part, such an “order” created itself as the dust of this apparent chaos settled. This may be viewed as evidence of its organic cohesion, that this discourse is indeed not simply a fabrication or a disjointed mixture of voices disconnected from society. Indeed, it remains true in the framework of this thesis that the conflation of these circulating ideas proves the existence of a communicating discourse, a living body rather than a compartmentalized narrative. It responded to the changes in its environment, as was clear in many cases throughout this analysis. In doing so, it assigned real meaning to the paradigm of national identity itself, the unifying factor in this collective of voices, upon which this envisioned society stands. That is, the “society” that remains a thread throughout this analysis has a placement in existing reality and that which has not yet been realized, and through this discourse on national identity it has shown its self-generating character. It must not be so that as a result of any discourse, which is simply an exchange of ideas, reality will begin to reflect its specificities. But what this thesis has intended to accomplish is to show that at least in part, the discourse on national identity in Hungary was in a sense a self-fulfilling prophecy.

³³⁰ Hankiss, *Alternatives.*, 125.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

It is hoped that the vision of Hungarian national identity within the framework of this discourse on society has risen at least in part from the text as it is presented here. While it is undoubtedly true that this thesis cannot claim clarity in this regard, it is also hoped that the partial achievement of this aim is fulfilled in highlighting the relevance of some of the themes here and illustrated perhaps some continuities, disconnects, and innovations in the time prior to 1970s and 1980s as well as that which followed. A final word must still be said on the extrapolation of this study to the general conclusions reached here. The stress on pluralism in a nation reemerging from a recent past in which its societal character was largely determined by a threat to its very existence is an attempt to reach a broader conclusion on the ability of a society to constantly innovate its own survival. Beyond this, the diversity of ideas and societal input only serves to further the development of the nation that it constitutes. This was true in the Hungarian case, where the environment of the 1970s and 1980s was one still without the guarantee of total individual freedom. While this thesis cannot claim, based on the evidence here, to make an authoritative statement on the strength of even Hungarian national identity under duress, it can at least rely on the conclusions here to assert that the foundations of this national community were ultimately strengthened by the manifold articulations of its members.

It is also not the intention to imply that there is an overarching continuity with a Hungarian national identity of the past, but these conclusions are reminiscent of the message behind Geza Ottlik's "Nothing's Lost." What exists of a nation is not based on the prevalence of its language or culture over others, nor is the insurance of its survival the essential reason for its existence. Rather it is the *essence* of things, as Ottlik shows, that may transform and embed itself into new forms, that may remain latent or only conjured through association. This may be the lesson for national identity through this study here; the striving for continuity

is a misplacement of intellectual energy. What cannot be recollected or retrieved will be left to the recesses of its history, but in the history of a national identity in the tumultuous 20th century shows that no matter the extent of its transformations, its essence will not be lost.

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